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SOUTHEAST ASIA
REPORT

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**AIR OPERATIONS IN
THE KHMER REPUBLIC
1 DEC 1971-15 AUG 1973** ✓

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REPORT



AIR OPERATIONS IN THE KHMER REPUBLIC

15 APR 74

HQ PACAF

Directorate of Operations Analysis
CHECO / CORONA HARVEST DIVISION

Prepared by:

Major Elder

Project CHECO 7th AF

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PROJECT CHECO REPORTS

The counterinsurgency and unconventional warfare environment of Southeast Asia has resulted in USAF airpower being employed to meet a multitude of requirements. These varied applications have involved the full spectrum of USAF aerospace vehicles, support equipment, and manpower. As a result, operational data and experiences have accumulated which should be collected, documented, and analyzed for current and future impact upon USAF policies, concepts, and doctrine.

Fortunately, the value of collecting and documenting our SEA experiences was recognized at an early date. In 1962, Hq USAF directed CINCPACAF to establish an activity which would provide timely and analytical studies of USAF combat operations in SEA and would be primarily responsive to Air Staff requirements and direction.

Project CHECO, an acronym for Contemporary Historical Examination of Current Operations, was established to meet the Air Staff directive. Based on the policy guidance of the Office of Air Force History and managed by Hq PACAF, with elements in Southeast Asia, Project CHECO provides a scholarly "on-going" historical examination, documentation, and reporting on USAF policies, concepts, and doctrine in PACOM. This CHECO report is part of the overall documentation and examination which is being accomplished. It is an authentic source for an assessment of the effectiveness of USAF airpower in PACOM when used in proper context. The reader must view the study in relation to the events and circumstances at the time of its preparation--recognizing that it was prepared on a contemporary basis which restricted perspective and that the author's research was limited to records available within his local headquarters area.

Robert E. Hiller

ROBERT E. HILLER
Director of Operations Analysis
DCS/Operations

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FOR THE COMMANDER IN CHIEF

V. H. Gallacher

V. H. GALLACHER, Lt Colonel, USAF
Chief, CHIECO/CORONA HARVEST Division
Ops Anal/DCS/Plans and Operations

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FOREWORD

(U) This report is one in a series of CHECO reports on air operations in the Khmer Republic.* It begins where the preceding report ended--1 December 1971. The period from 1 December 1971 until the Vietnam cease-fire on 28 January 1973 was relatively quiet with respect to U.S. air operations in the Khmer Republic. During that period the focus of U.S. airpower was on North Vietnam, South Vietnam, and Laos. Following the Vietnam cease-fire, and that in Laos within one month, American airpower was concentrated against an insurgency effort which was directed at the overthrow of the Khmer Government, and against North Vietnamese logistics activities in the eastern Khmer Republic. The main emphasis of this report, therefore, is on U.S. air operations in the Khmer Republic after the Vietnam and Laotian cease-fire agreements came into effect.

(U) An overview of the U.S. air involvement in the Khmer Republic since May 1970 is presented, and the report briefly summarizes air operations during the period 1 December 1971 to 28 January 1973. It then concentrates on the U.S. air activities associated with the temporary stand-down immediately following the Vietnam cease-fire and the subsequent intense application of airpower after mid-March 1973. The main thrust of the report is to describe how the Commander of the United States Support Activities Group (COMUSSAG)/Seventh Air Force adapted to the requirement of providing air support in the Khmer Republic.

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CHAPTER I

OVERVIEW

(S) Cambodia was a latecomer to the group of recipients of United States airpower support in Southeast Asia (SEA). There were reports of secret U.S. air strikes in Cambodia in the spring of 1969,¹ but it was not until May 1970 that a large-scale U.S. air involvement there began.² After the coup which deposed Prince Norodom Sihanouk in March 1970, Marshal Lon Nol requested U.S. help to counter Viet Cong (VC), North Vietnamese Army (NVA), and internal Khmer Insurgent pressure against his neutralist government. In response to Lon Nol's request and also to excise VC/NVA sanctuaries in Cambodia, the President of the United States ordered the 1 May 1970 cross-border incursion into Cambodia from South Vietnam. United States and South Vietnamese ground forces, supported by U.S. and South Vietnamese airpower, overran the enemy's staging areas. Then, as planned, U.S. ground forces withdrew into South Vietnam before 1 July 1970; but U.S. air support for the Lon Nol government continued and was gradually expanded.³

(TS) On 24 May 1970, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) directed the Commander, U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (COMUSMACV), and his deputy for air, the Commander of Seventh Air Force, to begin air interdiction operations in eastern Cambodia. The JCS operation plan called for interdiction of enemy base areas, stored supplies, and movement of men and materiel along the lines of communication (LOCs); air support of friendly troops

*In July 1973, the Pentagon confirmed these B-52 strikes.

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in contact (TIC); and reconnaissance. The original interdiction area (later nicknamed FREEDOM DEAL) was that part of Cambodia east of the Mekong River and north of Route 13.⁴ Before the end of 1970, however, the JCS had expanded the interdiction area to the west and south as shown in Figure 2; FREEDOM DEAL became the nickname for the entire area. There, the Rules of Engagement (ROE) permitted 7AF to conduct tactical air (TACAIR), gunship, and B-52 strikes against enemy troops and supplies. Initially, air strikes outside FREEDOM DEAL required specific JCS approval; however, in May 1971 the JCS gave COMUSMACV discretionary authority for TACAIR and gunship interdiction anywhere in the Khmer Republic* in any situation that posed a threat to major Khmer positions whose loss would be a military or psychological blow. In June 1971, COMUSMACV delegated his discretionary authority⁵ to the Commander, 7AF.

Although the U.S. air involvement in the Khmer Republic was planned as an interdiction effort, most strikes provided close air support or direct air support for the Khmer Republic's ground forces, the Forces Armees National Khmer (FANK). Nevertheless, in November 1970, 7AF directed its combat units to report all U.S. air strikes in the Khmer Republic as interdiction missions, the rationale being that any air support which helped retard the enemy's movement of men and supplies through the Khmer Republic to South Vietnam was, in effect, interdiction.⁶

*In October 1970, the Lon Nol government established the Khmer Republic, and the term "Cambodia" was abandoned.

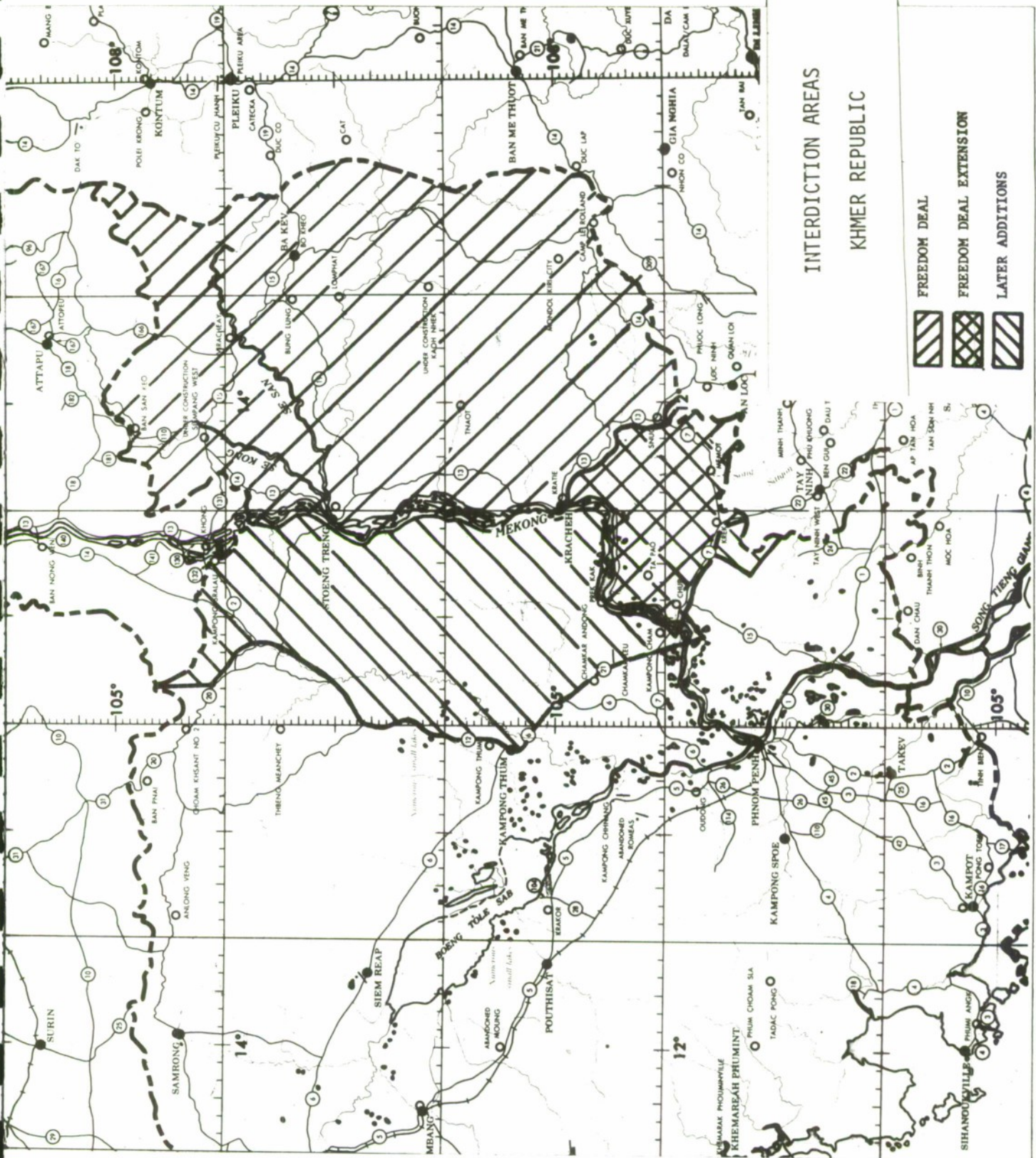


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(S) The so-called interdiction effort in the Khmer Republic continued essentially unchanged in nature from June 1970 into 1973, although it decreased in intensity in 1972 when U.S. air assets were committed against the major NVA offensive in South Vietnam and against targets in North Vietnam.⁷ The characteristics of the enemy threat and MACV/7AF's focus on the protracted commitments in South Vietnam and Laos left the Khmer Republic with a low priority for air operations. The NVA and VC controlled more than one-half of the Khmer Republic's territory and were apparently content to wage a war of attrition. While they harassed the FANK and the Khmer Government with short duration attacks designed to keep the FANK on the defensive and impede the flow of supplies to population centers, they avoided direct confrontation of the Khmer forces at a level that would produce a more intense U.S. air response.⁸ The enemy's strategy changed, however, after the cease-fire in Vietnam.

(S) The Vietnam cease-fire became effective on 28 January 1973. The cease-fire agreement specified that "foreign countries shall put an end to all military activities in Cambodia, totally withdraw from and refrain from introducing troops, military advisers and personnel, armaments, munitions, and war material."⁹ On 28 January, Marshal Lon Nol announced a unilateral suspension of Khmer offensive actions, effective 29 January. The enemy, however, exploited the lull which resulted from the FANK stand-down and the associated decrease in U.S. air operations.¹⁰ By mid-March, the enemy had begun what the U.S. Defense Attache Office (USDAO) in Phnom Penh described as a "major countryside offensive."¹¹

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(S) The USDAO and the FANK agreed as to the severity of the threat, but not on the composition of enemy forces. The indigenous Khmer Insurgents (KI) had assumed an increasing share of the enemy activity during 1972. Now, the USDAO described the enemy as primarily KI, advised and supported by the VC/NVA. The FANK, on the other hand, claimed that VC/NVA units were engaging in direct combat activity against the government forces. Noting that the FANK claims were undocumented, the USDAO reasoned that the VC/NVA were emphasizing logistics support to their operational elements in South Vietnam and logistics and combat support to the KI, but that following the Vietnam cease-fire they intended to keep a low profile in the Khmer Republic by avoiding any activity which could be directly attributed to them. According to USDAO estimates, the VC/NVA had approximately 35,000 total personnel in the Khmer Republic. Of these, about 3,500 provided artillery and sapper support, while as many as 2,000 others served as cadre in KI units. USDAO also estimated that the KI main force (combat) exceeded earlier estimates of 27,000 to 33,000 men. Whatever the case, Lon Nol considered the situation sufficiently grave to proclaim a state of siege¹² on 18 March 1973.

(TS) By that time, the U.S. had already increased air strikes in the Khmer Republic. Earlier, in the spirit of Lon Nol's unilateral cease-fire gesture in January, the JCS had limited the air operating authorities to permit U.S. air strikes only to counter specific hostile acts against the¹³ Khmer Government or the FANK. However, when it became apparent in early March that the VC/NVA-backed KI were making an unprecedented effort against

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the Khmer Government, and that the VC/NVA were continuing to move men and supplies through the Khmer Republic into South Vietnam, restraints on the employment of airpower were eased. Admiral Moorer, Chairman of the JCS, notified Admiral Noel Gayler, Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Command (CINCPAC), to direct an "appreciable weight of B-52s, TACAIR and gunships against fixed and fleeting targets in Cambodia,"¹⁴ and rescinded the restriction that air strikes were permitted only to counter specific hostile acts against the FANK. Air Force General John W. Vogt, Jr., commander of the newly formed U.S. Support Activities Group*¹⁵ (USSAG), Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai Air Force Base (RTAFB), Thailand, was given the responsibility¹⁶ for developing an effective campaign against these targets.

(S) General Vogt, as COMUSSAG and 7AF Commander, had operational responsibility for all U.S. combat air operations in SEA. In mid-March he began to apply his air assets on an expanded scale against the VC/NVA lines of communication and VC/NVA/KI ground forces. By the end of March, the USAF B-52, TACAIR, and gunship effort in the Khmer Republic had increased to about 220 sorties per day.¹⁷ This was about six times the combined sortie rate for USAF, U.S. Marine Corps, and South Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) attack aircraft in the Khmer Republic during 1972.¹⁸ The initial effort was primarily against the NVA/VC-controlled LOCs and logistics areas, but the steadily increasing KI pressure on the Khmer LOCs and population centers, especially Phnom Penh, changed the priorities. In May 1973, the

*On 15 February 1973, USSAG/7AF assumed SEA force employment responsibility from MACV, Saigon.

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typical daily sortie effort included 39 to 45 B-52s, 30 F-111s, approximately 110 F-4s, 30 A-7s, and 12 AC-130 gunships. In addition, there was a daily average of 35 Forward Air Controller (FAC) sorties and 96 support (tanker, reconnaissance, air support, and radio relay) sorties. The larger part of this air effort was now in direct or close air support of FANK¹⁹ forces, friendly population centers, and government supply convoys.

(S) The increase in enemy activity in the Khmer Republic had elicited an escalation of the U.S. air effort at a time when U.S. forces in SEA had expected to be in a cease-fire environment. Air operations in the Khmer Republic, previously given the lowest priority in SEA, were now the only combat air operations. Consequently, these operations received an unprecedented amount of attention from the press, the U.S. Congress, and, of course, JCS, CINCPAC, and COMUSSAG. Operating authorities, targeting²⁰ and command and control authority changed in reaction to the situation, as did the scope and intensity of air operations. Operating methods once widely used in combat in South Vietnam and Laos presented new problems when applied in the Khmer Republic. More than at any other time in the SEA conflict, the destiny of an Allied government seemed to be in the hands of American airmen. At the same time, the U.S. air effort was politically constrained. The Cooper-Church Amendment had prohibited U.S. personnel from participating in any in-country military training or advisory activities,²¹ and other activities in the Congress suggested that further restraints were forthcoming. Both the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives introduced measures aimed at ending or reducing the U.S.


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involvement in SEA, and the Senate Appropriations Committee unanimously approved an appropriations bill amendment prohibiting any funding whatsoever for bombing in the Khmer Republic.²²

(S) Although the FANK had held its ground with high levels of U.S. air support, and the enemy offensive seemed to falter by the end of May 1973, the USDAO reports from Phnom Penh were not optimistic. The FANK, battered by months of defensive fighting, were tired and discouraged. The fate of the FANK and the Lon Nol government appeared to hinge on U.S. air support, which possibly would soon terminate. The USDAO predicted that "June, if not the entire rainy season, will be pivotal as the future role of U.S. air in Cambodia is determined."²³

(U) The U.S. Congress determined the future role of U.S. air support for the Lon Nol government in July by forcing the President of the United States to agree to a 15 August 1973 deadline for the cessation of U.S. bombing.²⁴ If U.S. airpower were to bring the KI to the negotiating table, it would have to do so in less than six weeks, which was clearly impossible. Thus, the announcement of the impending bomb halt removed much of the existing pressure on the KI to negotiate. If the KI could survive through 15 August, their prospects for a military victory over the Lon Nol government would brighten considerably.²⁵

(U) The KI proved to be a determined enemy. Rather than waiting until the U.S. bombing stopped, the insurgents continued to carry the battle to the FANK. In so doing they showed that their forces were greater than U.S. intelligence sources had indicated at the end of 1972. Thus, in the



light of subsequent events, 1972 was apparently a vital building period for the KI. With the help of the VC/NVA, the insurgents developed into a formidable, determined fighting force in 1972 and proved it in 1973.

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CHAPTER II

SUMMARY OF AIR OPERATIONS

DECEMBER 1971 TO VIETNAM CEASE-FIRE

(S) Except for a decrease in their already relatively low intensity, air operations in the Khmer Republic from December 1971 until the Vietnam cease-fire remained essentially as described in the preceding CHECO report, Khmer Air Operations, Nov 70-Nov 71. That is, the operating rules, target validation procedures, and command and control relationships did not change-- only the level of effort. USAF and VNAF strike sorties reached a relative high point in December 1971 in support of an abortive FANK offensive (CHENLA II) and during the U.S. Commando Hunt VII dry season interdiction campaign. In January 1972, however, the sortie rates dropped dramatically and remained low until after the cease-fire: the number of USAF and VNAF TACAIR sorties in 1972 was about one third the number in 1971.²⁶ (See Appendix, page 75.)

(S) TACAIR support for the Khmer Republic decreased during the first three months of 1972 because the enemy was content to let the FANK rest in the purely defensive posture they assumed after their severe defeat during CHENLA II. The VC/NVA were preparing for their spring Nguyen Hue Offensive against South Vietnam and apparently preferred to avoid major engagements with the FANK or South Vietnamese Army (ARVN) forces in the Khmer Republic. An increased number of B-52 sorties were requested against the growing number of NVA/VC logistics targets in the northeastern, tri-border area of the Khmer Republic, but approvals were delayed until after the enemy offensive had begun.²⁷

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(S) When the NVA spring offensive began at the end of March, U.S. and VNAF TACAIR assets were diverted from the Khmer Republic to South Vietnam. Sorties available for the Khmer Republic were further reduced when the bombing operations over all of North Vietnam began in April and intensified in May. For the rest of the year, even after the VC/NVA offensive faltered in mid-June, U.S. and VNAF TACAIR supported ARVN efforts to retake lost ground, and U.S. aircraft continued to operate over North Vietnam. These priority operations, combined with the FANK's defensive posture and the VC/NVA's low profile in the Khmer Republic, kept TACAIR support for the Khmers at a low level throughout 1972.

(S) ARC LIGHT strikes in the Khmer Republic also reflected the VC/NVA operations against South Vietnam. The number of strikes, which had increased in March against the VC/NVA build-up in the portion of FREEDOM and South Vietnamese border, dropped sharply in April when the North Vietnamese surged across the border into South Vietnam. The further decrease in May corresponded to the initiation on 10 May of the LINEBACKER interdiction campaign against North Vietnam's transportation and supply systems. The number of B-52 strikes in the Khmer Republic began to rise again in June as the enemy offensive waned and the VC/NVA retreated into the Khmer Republic to regroup. The intense LINEBACKER II B-52 raids over North Vietnam from 18 through 29 December caused the Khmer Republic sortie rate for that month to decrease. For the entire year, though, the B-52 effort in the Khmer Republic was greater in 1972 than in 1971. (See Appendix, page 75.) Generally, the B-52s struck enemy

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LOCs, supply areas, truck parks, and base camps, while TACAIR provided close and direct air support for the FANK.

(S) USAF A-37s, F-4s, A-7s, and AC-130s provided most of the air support for the FANK during 1972. (USAF A-7s had arrived in SEA in October for use in the TACAIR role.) The 8th Special Operations Squadron at Bien Hoa Air Base (AB), South Vietnam, deactivated, turning their A-37s over to the VNAF. Marine Corps A-4s out of Bien Hoa began flying attack sorties in the Khmer Republic in May 1972; and from June through the end of the year they averaged some 150 sorties per month. Although the VNAF did support the FANK, most of their A-1, A-37, and F-5 TACAIR sorties supported ARVN incursions into the eastern border areas of the Khmer Republic. VNAF AC-119 gunships supported* FANK ground units so that the Khmers could use their AC-47 gunships on other missions, such as night surveillance of Phnom Penh's ³¹ Pochentong Airfield.

(S) Khmer Air Force (KAF) operations remained fairly constant during 1972 as USAF and VNAF participation decreased. On 31 May, for example, the KAF had 103 aircraft, a figure which included 24 T-28s for TACAIR, 18 O-1D FAC aircraft, and 6 AC-47 gunships. The remaining aircraft (about one half of them helicopters) were used for training or resupply. During May (a typical month for KAF operations) the Khmers flew 329 T-28, 168 FAC, 85 gunship sorties, and 1,131 combat support sorties. During the same month, USAF TACAIR, gunship, and B-52 sorties totaled 266, and the VNAF flew 131 TACAIR and gunship sorties in the Khmer Republic. The number

*It should be noted that this support was limited as a result of the language barrier. [Ed.]

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of USAF TACAIR sorties (239) was the lowest since the 1970 incursion. Also in that month, the B-52 and VNAF sortie rates showed marked decreases, since the U.S. and South Vietnamese assets were countering the VC/NVA offensive in SVN.³²

(S) Although the VC/NVA focused their military efforts on South Vietnam, they, with the Khmer Insurgents, maintained an offensive position with respect to the FANK and repeatedly frustrated FANK efforts to attain their military objectives. Those objectives, as stated by the FANK in March 1972, were to (1) secure LOCs and major supply routes, (2) eliminate major enemy units, (3) reestablish the Khmer Government infrastructure, (4) protect and hold major population centers, and (5) maintain constant pressure on the enemy by increased USAF, VNAF, and KAF interdiction. The FANK realized few of its objectives, however, because "hit and run" enemy tactics kept

ns confined to defensive positions along major LOCs and in urban centers. Any offensive actions taken by the FANK would have required heavy U.S. air support, but U.S. assets were heavily committed to South Vietnam.³³

(S) The willingness and ability of the KI to play a more active role in enemy activities against the Khmer Government was one reason the enemy successfully kept the FANK off balance even when the VC and NVA were occupied in South Vietnam.³⁴ By directing stand-off attacks, sabotage, and terrorist activities against the Khmer populace, the numerically-inferior KI forces were able to keep the FANK in defensive positions in their continuing effort to protect the population centers. For example, in the Phnom Penh area in July 1972, there were 70 to 80 FANK battalions defending against 10 enemy battalions.

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(S) On the basis of one estimate, enemy main force strength throughout the Khmer Republic was 5,000 to 6,000 hard-core troops.³⁵ At the end of December 1972, the force estimate was the same.* However, according to U.S. sources the war had become largely a FANK versus KI struggle, with the VC/NVA providing logistics, fire, and training support to the KI.³⁸

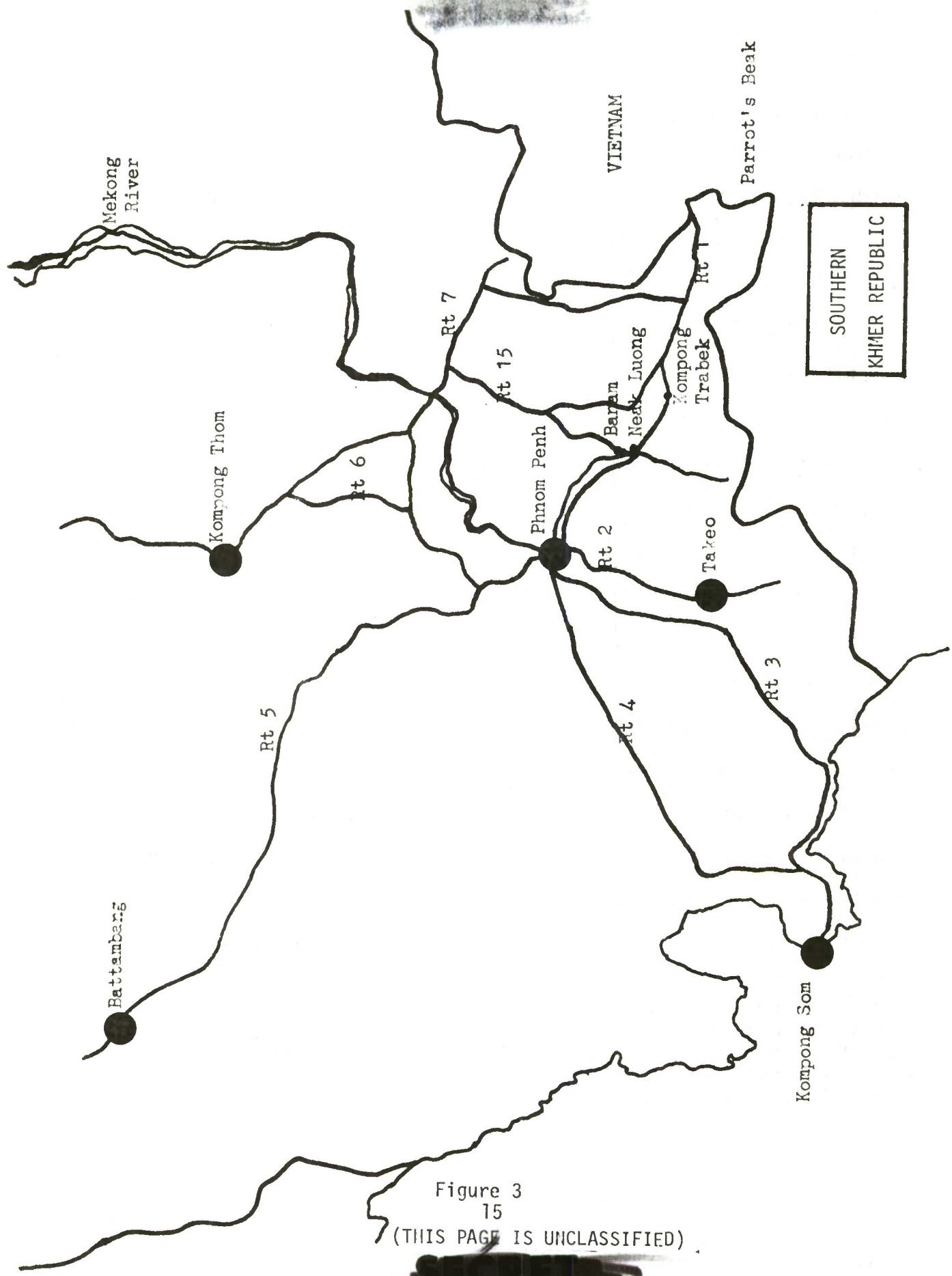
(S) The FANK initiated an offensive action against the VC/NVA after the enemy had withdrawn their troops into the Parrot's Beak area of southeastern Cambodia following heavy losses in South Vietnam in mid-1972.

(See Figure 3.) COMUSMACV concentrated B-52 and TACAIR strikes in the area, and FANK forces launched an offensive to open Route 1 from the Mekong River toward the Parrot's Beak. Simultaneously, ARVN units began a drive to clear the route east of Svay Rieng. The FANK and ARVN objective was to make Route 1, which had been interdicted by the enemy for several months, safe for truck convoy traffic. Supported by a large USAF TACAIR effort, the FANK enjoyed a limited and temporary success by opening Route 1 between Neak Luong on the Mekong and Kompong Trabek.³⁹

(S) The enemy forces reacted sharply to the FANK incursion into their sanctuary, because it posed a serious threat to their vital supply line into the delta region of South Vietnam. Demonstrating their determination to protect their LOC, the North Vietnamese introduced T-54 medium tanks

*(S) This estimate of enemy combat troop strength at the end of the year is suspect since the USDAQ in May 1973 estimated the KI combat strength alone to be over 30,000.³⁶ General Vogt in July 1973 estimated that the KI strength had grown from about 30,000 in December 1972 to about 50,000 in July 1973, primarily through conscription by threat.³⁷

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SOUTHERN
KHMER REPUBLIC

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and PT-76 light amphibious tanks into the battle, apparently the first time the enemy had used armor in the Khmer Republic. Although USAF TACAIR destroyed six of the T-54 tanks on 6 August, the NVA successfully countered the FANK offensive. By the end of November, Route 1 from Neak Luong to Svay Rieng was again in enemy hands.⁴⁰

(C) As the NVA drove its counteroffensive along Route 1 using armor, artillery, and sizeable ground forces, FANK forces at Kompong Trabek became surrounded, and so required aerial resupply. In response, USAF C-130s of the 374th Tactical Airlift Wing airdropped supplies at Kompong Trabek and at Svay Rieng where the ARVN troops were based. Although the FANK and ARVN terminated offensive moves along Route 1 and hoped to maintain a status quo there, the C-130s continued to resupply Svay Rieng through the end of the year.⁴¹ The 374th TAW airdropped approximately 1,594 tons of rice, ammunition, and medical supplies to Svay Rieng in 1972.⁴² The USAF air drops at Svan Rieng and other areas where FANK and ARVN forces became isolated were complemented by VNAF C-123 aerial resupply.⁴³

(C) The requirements for USAF and VNAF aerial resupply spread to other areas of the Khmer Republic as the enemy, anticipating a cease-fire, increased offensive activities in January 1973. By interdicting LOCs and harassing population centers, the enemy achieved dual benefits: they (1) kept the FANK away from VC/NVA supply lines into South Vietnam and (2) forced aerial resupply to isolated population centers. Kompong Thom (about 80 miles north of Phnom Penh) and Takeo (40 miles south) were just two of the population centers which required aerial resupply in January. These and other areas continued to require C-130 support after the cease-fire.⁴⁴

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(S) The enemy established a definite pattern during 1972. The VC/NVA, with their attention focused on South Vietnam, still exerted enough pressure to keep the FANK off balance while they helped the KI become a viable military force. This released more VC/NVA troops for deployment to South Vietnam. Their success in developing a formidable KI fighting force was evidenced by the KI's sustained offensive after the cease-fire. The KI's determined drive to isolate Phnom Penh and topple the Lon Nol government, combined with the NVA's logistics activity in the Khmer Republic, evoked the concentrated application of U.S. airpower in the Khmer Republic beginning in March 1973.

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CHAPTER III

AUTHORITIES AND PROCEDURES AFTER THE VIETNAM CEASE-FIRE

(S) The operating authorities and control procedures for air operations in the Khmer Republic changed significantly during and after the cease-fire. Although U.S. intelligence personnel did not necessarily expect Marshal Lon Nol's unilateral cessation of offensive actions to evoke a similar response from the enemy, the United States' policy was to give the cease-fire every chance to succeed. Secretary of State William P. Rogers directed the cessation of all U.S. TACAIR and B-52 strikes as of 0700 hours Phnom Penh time on 29 January 1973, but he kept an option open for further U.S. strikes depending on the post-cease-fire situation.⁴⁵ The U.S. Ambassador to the Khmer Republic, Emory C. Swank, pointed out that in any case "the use of USAF resources [in the Khmer Republic]⁴⁶ will henceforth have substantial political implications." Thus, the JCS and the Secretary of State promulgated rules and procedures⁴⁷ for air operations in a cease-fire environment. Within two months, however, the rules were changed to give COMUSSAG the flexibility to blunt the enemy offensive.

Operating Authorities and Procedures

(S) Before the cease-fire, 7AF's TACAIR was responsive to FANK ground commanders' requests through USAF FACs and to requests from the FANK General Staff through the FANK liaison office in the 7AF Tactical Air Control Center (TACC). In the first case, the FANK liaison office validated the target and

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the TACC checked it against the ROE before allotting the air support from available assets. In the second case, FACs reconnoitered the targets and, if possible, talked to the ground commanders before the TACC would approve the strikes. The American Embassy in Phnom Penh was not involved in the process.⁴⁸

(S) As the cease-fire approached, the JCS and the Secretary of State directed that Ambassador Swank's approval would be required for all post-cease-fire air strikes in the Khmer Republic. The Embassy would have final strike approval from a political standpoint if the strike request met the ROE and was approved by 7AF. The Senior Defense Attache in Phnom Penh, U.S. Army Colonel Ray L. Burnell, Jr., proposed strike requests and target validation procedures which met Washington's requirements.⁴⁹ The JCS approved the new procedures, and 7AF implemented them on 2 February.

Ground commanders were responsible for identifying to the FANK General Staff situations which required air support. If the General Staff judged Khmer Air Force resources insufficient to meet the threat, they would contact the American Embassy.* The Embassy would determine whether or not the situation required USAF support and, if so, would forward the validated request to BLUE CHIP, the command and control center in the TACC at 7AF. BLUE CHIP would check the request against the current ROE before directing any strikes. On a case-by-case basis, 7AF would launch FACs to help the Embassy evaluate the threat. If a FAC received a request

*The South Vietnamese stopped ground and air support for the Khmers when the cease-fire went into effect.

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for air support from the FANK, he would forward it to the Embassy for KAF support or Embassy validation as outlined above. The Battle Staff Commander at BLUE CHIP, considering the FANK ground commander's evaluation, determined the type and amount of ordnance for all strikes.⁵⁰ Contrary to subsequent press charges, the Embassy did not target or control air strikes in the Khmer Republic--those responsibilities were exclusively General Vogt's.⁵¹

(S) As the new procedures went into effect, Colonel Burnell assured Brigadier General Jack Bellamy, 7AF Assistant Director of Operations, that the Embassy was taking a "rigorous view of their role in approving U.S. air activity in the Khmer Republic." He noted that the Embassy had received the first FANK request for U.S. air support on the night of 29 January, the first evening of Lon Nol's cease-fire, but that after Ambassador Swank explained the new policy permitting U.S. strikes only in response to hostile enemy acts, the General Staff decided that U.S. intervention was not necessary.⁵²

(S) The Embassy forwarded the first requests for limited U.S. air support to 7AF on 9 February. The FANK General Staff made the requests to bolster key tactical positions against which the enemy was exerting heavy pressure. General Vogt, under authorities granted to him by the JCS, approved the use of limited U.S. airpower in principle, but retained approval authority for each individual request. During this time, in Saigon, MACV was being deactivated, and 7AF was moving to Nakhon Phanom RTAFB.⁵³

(S) For the first three weeks of February, U.S. air activity in the Khmer Republic remained at a very low level because of U.S. hopes for Lon

Nol's cease-fire and because 7AF's air assets were being directed against enemy targets in Laos in an effort to pressure the enemy into a cease-fire agreement there.⁵⁴ The enemy took advantage of the decreased FANK

ground and U.S. air operations and increased their aggressiveness. At the same time, U.S. reconnaissance and intelligence sources revealed a substantial increase in enemy logistics activities in the northeastern regions of the Khmer Republic. The U.S. intelligence personnel interpreted this as a renewed threat to South Vietnam.⁵⁵

(S) The 22 February cease-fire in Laos reinforced the theory that the concentrated application of airpower was an effective way to bring about serious cease-fire negotiations. This conclusion militated in favor of an intensified U.S. air effort in the Khmer Republic. Although USAF TACAIR sorties increased from 35 in the third week of February to 247 in the fourth week to break an enemy siege of Kompong Thom,⁵⁶ Ambassador Swank was nevertheless still optimistic about Lon Nol's cease-fire. Referring to the Kompong Thom effort as a "one time air campaign," the Ambassador proposed that after 26 February air support return to the mode of operations under which 7AF would assist the FANK consistent with Lon Nol's cessation of offensive activities. At the same time, however, he acknowledged that the continuing level of enemy activity would require AC-130 SPECTRE support on 26 and 27 February, and he anticipated the need for gunship, FAC, and TACAIR support for the remainder of that week. He requested FAC coverage of Kompong Thom, the Route 15/Route 1 area, Routes 2 and 3, and possibly Routes 4, 5, 6, and 7. To

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give the FAC OV-10s operating from Ubon RTAFB more time on station, the Ambassador permitted them to refuel at Pochentong Airfield but cautioned them to avoid publicity because of the U.S. troop limitation in the Khmer Republic.⁵⁷ The USAF sortie rate did drop the first week in March, but⁵⁸ the reduction was only temporary.

(TS) Viewing the build-up of North Vietnamese supplies, equipment, and personnel in FREEDOM DEAL, and the increasing enemy pressure on Khmer Government positions, the JCS on 8 March suggested an expansion of the air operating authorities. On 9 March, the Ambassador and the FANK Chief of Staff approved the new JCS authorities and new operational procedures proposed by General Vogt. The new rules permitted air interdiction of the VC/NVA supply routes, storage areas, and transshipment points throughout FREEDOM DEAL. They also increased the scope of air operations throughout the Khmer Republic by permitting the use of the full spectrum of U.S. air strike forces against targets posing a threat to friendly forces and population centers, thus deleting the requirement that air response be provided only to avert actual loss of positions. The FANK General Staff reestablished the prevalidated LOC structure in FREEDOM DEAL, and 7AF developed validation procedures for all other targets. Although Embassy and FANK approval were no longer required for TACAIR and gunship strikes in FREEDOM DEAL, FACs would control all TACAIR sorties. For B-52 strikes in FREEDOM DEAL, 7AF would submit the targets through the Embassy to secure FANK approval. Any strike outside FREEDOM DEAL still required Embassy validation.⁵⁹

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(S) The numbers of B-52 and TACAIR strikes increased substantially in the second week of March, but in the third week they increased dramatically as the military situation in the Khmer Republic became more critical. USAF TACAIR sorties went from 365 in the second week to 1,392 in the third while ARC LIGHT strikes went from 165 to 409.⁶⁰

(TS) With the tremendous increase in the number of strikes, the validation procedure soon became what Ambassador Swank described "a very onerous burden" for the Embassy. On 17 April the Ambassador explained that even when augmented by TDY personnel to the limit of the in-country ceiling,⁶¹* the small Air Attache staff had "to work night and day under enormous pressures to meet exacting operational requirements in a satisfactory manner." Noting that the political advantages of separating the Embassy from the operational TACAIR role were evident, Ambassador Swank strongly recommended that CINCPAC approve a proposal that General Vogt had made to delete the requirement for the Embassy's validation of each TACAIR strike outside FREEDOM DEAL.⁶²

(S) General Vogt's proposed validation procedures, approved by CINCPAC and Washington, became effective on 19 April. The Embassy and the FANK had already given indefinite validation for TACAIR and gunship strikes within FREEDOM DEAL except for friendly areas. Now, for 30-day periods, the Embassy gave blanket validation for TACAIR and gunship strikes outside FREEDOM DEAL, although the FANK continued to validate each target

*The Foreign Assistance Act of 1971 (Public Law 92-226) imposed a ceiling of 200 U.S. and 85 third country national employees of the U.S. government in the Khmer Republic at any one time.

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there. Both Embassy and FANK approvals were still required for each B-52 strike in the Khmer Republic.⁶³

(C) The removal of the Embassy from the TACAIR target validation procedure also removed 7AF's communication link with the FANK high command. The USDAO had been providing the vital link for air support coordination between 7AF and the FANK Combat Operations Center (COC) through an operation known as Area Control. Area Control was a radio relay center in the Embassy where USDAO personnel passed targeting information back and forth between 7AF command and control personnel and the FANK COC, giving the Embassy's political approvals for air strikes. Its removal required the development of an entirely new command and control concept.⁶⁴

Command and Control

(C) When the American Embassy withdrew from the TACAIR target validation procedure in April 1973 and closed Area Control, there were several projects underway which 7AF, the Embassy, and the Khmers were able to weld together to serve in place of Area Control as the command and control link. One of these was the newly-established Khmer Direct Air Support Center (KDASC).⁶⁵

(S) Although the primary function of the Khmer Air Force was to provide close and direct air support for the FANK, the KAF did not have a KDASC to affect the essential coordination between Khmer air and ground forces. In mid-February 1973, 7AF dispatched a four-man survey team from the deactivating 505th Tactical Control Group at Tan Son Nhut AB, South Vietnam, to Phnom Penh to advise the DAO on implementing a DASC.⁶⁶ The

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team was eventually successful, but the situation it initially encountered was indicative of the undeveloped state of KAF capabilities.

(S) The survey team members reported that when they arrived in Phnom Penh on 12 February, no Tactical Air Control System (TACS) existed and that "the mere establishment of a DASC will not solve the Tactical Air Control problems present in the Khmer Air Force." The team recommended the development of a rudimentary TACS with the KDASC as the major operational component designed to direct, control, and coordinate close air support in the Khmer Republic. The KDASC would also coordinate tactical reconnaissance and tactical airlift with the Air Operations Control Center,⁶⁷ which was not used extensively by the FANK who preferred to deal with the 7AF TACC.⁶⁸ While the primary function of the KDASC would be to provide immediate air support for Khmer Army and Navy forces, it would also be responsible for preplanned air strikes, possibly including interdiction missions. The team noted, however, that the KDASC would not perform one of the primary functions of a DASC--diverting sorties to immediate targets--because that authority was retained by 7AF.⁶⁹

(S) In addition to the technical problems, Khmer intra-service rivalries retarded the KDASC's development. The KAF was reluctant to collocate the DASC with the FANK headquarters because the KAF believed it was the first step of an Army effort to take over the KAF. Although the primary purpose of the DASC was to support the FANK, the KAF wanted the DASC located at KAF headquarters. Colonel Burnell, the Defense Attache, stated:

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It is a knotty situation involving strange political undercurrents and jealousies. MG Fernandez [then FANK Chief of Staff] is apparently aware of this and is trying very hard to smooth out the problem. Unfortunately, some commanders who theoretically are under Fernandez's command do bypass him and deal directly with Lon Nol.

Colonel Burnell recommended that the DASC be established at FANK headquarters as planned. He said that the Army would run it if the KAF wouldn't. ⁷⁰

(S) The appointment of a highly qualified KAF officer as the KDASC director resolved the jurisdiction dispute, and the KDASC was located at the FAIK Combat Operations Center. The KDASC was manned entirely by the KAF, including several English-speaking Khmers to communicate with American airmen. It began limited operations on 30 March 1973, assisting in validation of targets for U.S. TACAIR outside FREEDOM DEAL. ⁷¹ The KDASC (known as Bakheng Control) eventually replaced Area Control in April as the primary avenue by which 7AF received FANK target validations and air support requests. The 7AF contact with Bakheng Control was through the Airborne Battlefield Command and Control Center (ABCCC), the key element in another project already on the way. ⁷²

(S) To aid in coordinating U.S. operations, the ABCCC* had been in operation over the Khmer Republic or southern Laos since the Vietnam cease-fire. Prior to the cease-fire, however, the 7AF TACC (BLUE CHIP) had exercised command and control of immediate U.S. air strikes in the Khmer Republic via Sundog Alpha, a radio relay station at Hui Ba Dinh Mountain,

*The ABCCC is a C-130 equipped with a command and control capsule.

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South Vietnam. (FACs and gunships controlling strikes communicated with BLUE CHIP through Sundog Alpha.) BLUE CHIP contacted the 7AF Target Management Office to ascertain that the targets were validated by the FANK and complied with the ROE. If so, and the assets were available, BLUE CHIP authorized the strikes and directed the aircraft with the proper ordnance to the target areas where the FACs took charge.⁷³ Shortly after the ceasefire, the deactivation of Sundog Alpha and the transfer of BLUE CHIP to Nakhon Phanom broke the radio communication link between BLUE CHIP and the FACs operating over the Khmer Republic.⁷⁴ Therefore, 7AF moved the ABCCC (which had coordinated air strikes in Laos for several years) to the Khmer Republic. Initially, the ABCCC served as little more than a radio relay platform between Area Control and BLUE CHIP, where 7AF validated the targets, a time-consuming procedure.⁷⁵

(S) The lack of rapid communications became a problem in early March as the number of targets in the Khmer Republic increased markedly. Seventh Air Force reinstituted a visual reconnaissance strike list so that targets of a non-fleeting nature would be recorded and disseminated to all FACs for timely coverage; but the command and control system needed further streamlining to shorten the target processing and validation time in critical situations, in particular for the protection of Mekong River convoys. At the suggestion of the Embassy the 7AF target management personnel, in coordination with the 7th Airborne Command and Control Squadron at Korat RTAFB, developed a proposal to delegate BLUE CHIP's target management and validation functions to the Director of the ABCCC Air Battle Staff.

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The authority would be issued only for specific operating areas for limited time periods, since General Vogt felt that the sensitive nature of the U.S. involvement in the Khmer Republic required the full control of U.S. airpower to be within his headquarters.⁷⁶

(C) Seventh Air Force first implemented the new proposal on a limited basis in support of Mekong River convoys in April 1973. The experiment (nicknamed Special Mekong Air Sector--SMAS) significantly reduced response time for bringing U.S. strike aircraft to the aid of the convoys. With this success, General Vogt saw the elements of a truly responsive command and control system, capable of immediate reaction to the unpredictable ground situation in the Khmer Republic. Since the ABCCC and the KDASC were already there, he decided to delegate 7AF's authority for approving all immediate air strikes in the Khmer Republic to the senior battle staff member aboard the ABCCC.⁷⁷

(S) The new command and control arrangement worked well. Personnel from the 7AF Target Management Office trained the ABCCC staff in target approval procedures for the Khmer Republic. The need for a FANK liaison office at 7AF for target validation was eliminated because the ABCCC communicated directly with the KDASC. Seventh Air Force headquarters fraggged air into the contested areas day and night, but the ABCCC determined its utilization based upon the immediate situation. The ABCCC with its specialized crew was making on-the-spot judgments normally done on the ground by a U.S. DASC or TACC.⁷⁸ Daily guidance was provided by Hq 7AF, and the ABCCC staff referred any target requests not clearly within their delegated authorities to COMUSSAG/7AF for approval.⁷⁹

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(S) General Vogt noted the practical success of the concept after
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it was in effect for one month:

We are employing ABCCC aircraft 24 hours a day and the entire [air] war is being controlled by airmen, in the air, in direct contact with troops on the ground. The Embassy is completely out of the tactical air business. We now have a situation where there is a man on the ground working with a FAC who, in turn, is in contact with ABCCC. ABCCC has the authority to call in the kinds of air and [determine] the manner of air employment necessary to do the job. It is highly responsive. We never had this in Laos and, if we had to return, I would recommend a similar program.

Indeed, first reports indicated that the new procedure had reduced target
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validation time by one half.

(C) Another element which further streamlined the improved command and control system was the identification, for the first time, of FANK ground commanders qualified as Forward Air Guides (FAGs). A similar FAG program had reduced reaction times for air support in Laos. To adopt the concept in the Khmer Republic, the FANK General Staff granted select ground commanders political and military approval authority for air strikes in support of their operations. Upon the insistence of General Vogt and the USDAO, the General Staff's selection of the FAGs was extremely stringent and each nominee had to be specifically approved by USDAO and 7AF. The USDAO published an initial list of 12 FAGs on 28 April and supplemented it with 13 more in May. Each FAG was English-speaking or had an English-speaking radio operator available to him for communication with American FACs. The FAGs began operating on 1 May 1973 after the resolution of a
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brief problem concerning the FAGs' limits of authority.

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(S) The problem concerned the establishment of reasonable geographic limits for each FAG's area of operations. The FANK were not noted for exercising restraint when requesting air support, and the American and General Staff planners envisioned one FAG helpfully calling in air strikes on another friendly commander's positions. The FANK General Staff solved the problem in a simple, ingenious way. The COC issued each FAG 1:50,000-scale maps for his area of operations. The COC controlled the area of responsibility of each FAG by the number of maps issued him. Without the correct map, a FAG would be unable to give proper target validation for air strike.

(S) The FAGs added another dimension of flexibility to the command and control structure. Now, these ground commanders could request air support through either Bakheng Control or a U.S. FAC; when a FAG requested air support, FANK validation of the target was inherent in the request. When an American FAC working with a FAG received a valid request, he asked for the required air support from ABCCC where the decisions on the amount and type of support were made, normally without further communication with either BLUE CHIP or Bakheng Control. The FAGs and the English-speaking radio operators were valuable assets to the FANK. Unfortunately, there were not enough of them to cover all of the forward areas, and one FAG would have to cover many areas, calling in air support for perhaps eight or ten units that were under attack.

(C) Since the radio operators were in contact with the American FACs overhead, they were much-sought-after individuals. The commanders who had

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radio operators stood a better chance of receiving air support, which they claimed they needed. This created some difficulty for the U.S. FACs.⁸⁵


(C) When 7AF FACs ingressed over the Khmer Republic, they first checked in with the ABCCC which gave them areas and ground commanders with whom to work. Upon a FAC's initial radio contact with any ground commander, nearly all of the FANK commanders hearing the radio contact would call in for the FAC to work with them. According to the FACs, each commander invariably claimed he had troops in contact knowing that to be the highest priority situation for receiving air support. Although the FACs were aware that the TIC calls were normally exaggerated, the constant radio calls were extremely distracting and could drown out their assigned ground contacts. If a FAC gave his contact a new frequency to use, the other radio operators would hear, switch to that frequency, and continue calling. The FAC would have to instruct his contact to give him a new frequency to which the FAC would tune without repeating it over the air. Since the PRC 25 radios used by the FAGs were line-of-sight and weaker than the aircraft transmitters, fewer neighboring radio operators could hear the choice of new frequency⁸⁶ and, thus, the radio traffic was significantly reduced on that frequency. Obviously, the U.S. FACs were as much in demand as the FANK radio operators.

(S) The slow FACs in their OV-10s were indispensable elements in the command and control of U.S. TACAIR in the Khmer Republic. Besides providing the vital link between the ground commanders and the ABCCC, the FACs visually reconnoitered targets and insured the validity of ground commanders' requests

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for air support, marked the targets, and assessed the results. FACs of the 23d Tactical Air Support Squadron at Nakhon Phnom RTAFB, operating from Operating Location (OL)-1, Ubon RTAFB, controlled TACAIR strikes outside FREEDOM DEAL during daylight hours. The FACs flew their OV-10s out of Ubon RTAFB because of that base's proximity to the Khmer Republic. Until 17 June 1973, Fast FACs flying F-4s controlled strikes in FREEDOM DEAL during daylight hours. However, General Vogt terminated that program in mid-June because, after the loss of one F-4 and a close call with another, he believed the program was costing more than it was worth, especially since the main thrust of U.S. airpower had shifted to close air support outside the FREEDOM DEAL area.⁸⁷

(S) As the focus of U.S. airpower changed from interdiction in FREEDOM DEAL to close air support outside FREEDOM DEAL, the lack of U.S. advisers on the ground became an acute problem. The new command and control structure helped compensate for this lack, but nothing completely took the place of U.S. advisers. General Vogt pointed out how important it was that the ground commanders understand completely the proper use of air--how to call it in, how to describe the ground situation, how to mark friendly positions, how to designate targets, how to protect their troops from the collateral effects of close air strikes, how to report results, and so on. With no advisers to help them, the FANK forces had to learn these through their own experiences. The American airmen observed them making the same mistakes again and again: these mistakes would have been quickly corrected by American advisers.⁸⁸ The FACs tried to overcome these problems from the



air, but it was not as effective as being on the ground with the units. The FACs had a continual problem with FANK commanders who would not have their troops properly protected when receiving close air support. One FAC related a story about a ground commander who had a TIC situation and was about to receive air support (a 2,000-pound bomb). His FAC asked him if his troops were protected; the ground commander replied that they were. The FAC emphasized that the ordnance was a "big, big bomb" and that the troops should be well dug in. The ground commander assured the FAC that everyone was dug in, whereupon the FAC gave the strike aircraft permission to deliver the bomb. After the bomb hit and exploded nearly on target, the FAC asked the ground commander for an assessment of the results. The FANK commander replied that it would take some time to get that information, because his observer had been knocked out of a tree by the bomb blast and had to climb back up. Although a light story, it does illustrate the problem. A ground adviser would not have allowed the strike to proceed under the circumstances. Other incidents did not prove humorous, and the FACs⁸⁹ were hesitant to believe some ground commanders' assurances.

(S) Although General Vogt believed 7AF had done well to devise systems to provide air support without ground advisers, he emphasized that these systems were not as effective as advisory teams on the ground. He stated, "The lack of advisers in Cambodia is the largest single factor in making it impossible for us to achieve some of the things there that we achieved in⁹⁰ South Vietnam and Laos regarding the proper use of air."

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Convoy Protection Procedures

(C) Until the Khmer Insurgents began direct attacks on the defense forces around Phnom Penh, the post-cease-fire war in the Khmer Republic was a struggle for control of the LOCs, particularly the Mekong River between Phnom Penh and the South Vietnamese border. Phnom Penh's primary means of supply was by Mekong River convoy. Normally, three convoys each month were scheduled to travel the Mekong from Tan Chau, South Vietnam, to Phnom Penh and return. An average convoy consisted of 10 merchantmen, about half of them tankers carrying petroleum, oil, and lubricants (POL); the remainder were cargo ships and tugs towing barges with rice and ammunition. The Vietnamese Navy escorted the convoys to the Khmer Republic border where the Khmer Navy (MNK) took over. The MNK escort normally totaled about 30 craft organized into several groups to provide mobile firepower. The convoy transit time for the 60 miles from the border to Phnom Penh varied from 8 to 20 hours, depending on the season and the types of ships. Since the convoys usually stretched out 30 to 40 kilometers as they sailed the river to Phnom Penh, each presented numerous targets for insurgent gunners. 91

(S) The convoys were especially vulnerable at several points along the Mekong, where they came under attacks by fire. A favorite location of communist gunners was just above Banam at a narrow part of the river. 92 According to a FAC who controlled TACAIR strikes along the river, the insurgents usually attacked the convoys with indirect fire from mortars and direct fire from small arms, automatic weapons, and recoilless rifles. The mortars were fired about one kilometer from the river's edge while the

direct fire came from tunnel openings along the river bank. The insurgents tunneled to the river bank from about 500 meters back and hid in⁹³ the tunnels until ready to fire. The threat to river traffic became so great after the cease-fire that the American Embassy considered the⁹⁴ Mekong closed to convoys.

(S) The KI had gained control of significant portions of both banks of the Mekong in March 1973. The insecurity along the river corridor forced a convoy scheduled for 27 March to be postponed indefinitely. The USDAO noted on 11 April that the "FANK must reestablish and maintain control along the Mekong. It must succeed in permitting the arrival of a major convoy soon if Government control and economic stability are to be main-⁹⁵tained in Phnom Penh." By that time, the Embassy and 7AF had already coordinated plans for air support operations to assist the FANK in reopening the Mekong.

(S) On 1 April, U.S. Army Brigadier General John R. D. Cleland, Chief of the Military Equipment Delivery Team for--and ranking U.S. soldier in--the Khmer Republic, forwarded to General Vogt a FANK General Staff request for new measures in support of Mekong convoys. General Cleland's message proposed the concept of a Special Mekong Air Sector (SMAS) with sectors located at contested areas along the river for individual FAC control. Each sector was 10 kilometers wide on both sides of the river, and would be assigned to a FAC who would direct orbiting strike aircraft into the SMAS on immediate strikes. The sectors would be redefined or terminated as the⁹⁶ ground situation dictated. In order to provide responsive air cover

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while still complying with the JCS directives requiring both Embassy and Khmer Government validation of all targets, General Vogt suggested that the Embassy declare the SMASs militarily critical and prevalidate the targets there. Further, he proposed that a FANK officer be with the ABCCC to provide rapid Khmer target validation.⁹⁷ The Director of the Air Battle Staff aboard the ABCCC would have 7AF's authority to approve strike requests. This would be the first trial of the streamlined command and control structure which General Vogt eventually applied throughout the western Khmer Republic. It proved to be an extremely responsive TACAIR support package.⁹⁸

(S) The FANK, the Embassy, and 7AF first employed the SMAS concept to safeguard Mekong convoys in April. During daylight hours a FAC and two A-7s escorted the convoys. Two other A-7s were with a KC-135 tanker to replace the escort A-7s if the escorts expended or needed fuel. The A-7s were used in place of F-4s because they used less fuel and provided a longer loiter time above the convoys. For additional support, if required, F-4s, A-7s, and a gunship were on ground alert. At night an AC-130 was the escort.⁹⁹ The entire TACAIR operation was monitored at USSAG/7AF headquarters through an innovative radio relay network. The ABCCC monitored the communications between the convoy commanders and the FACs and retransmitted them at a different frequency to a KC-135 radio relay aircraft orbiting at 31,000 feet over the western Khmer Republic. The KC-135 relayed the signals to USSAG/7AF headquarters where they were received on the hostile aircraft early warning (TEABALL) equipment. The system

allowed General Bellamy, Director of Operations, and the BLUE CHIP staff to follow ground situations as they developed and anticipate requirements for air support.¹⁰⁰

(S) In addition to the TACAIR and gunship support, preparatory bombing by B-52s and F-111s also aided the safe passage of the Mekong convoys. The night before a convoy's departure, B-52s bombed suspected enemy positions along the river. Approximately two hours prior to the convoy's arrival in high threat areas, F-111s bombed the banks of the Mekong with general purpose 500-pound bombs to keep the enemy away from the river while the convoy passed.¹⁰¹ The heavy B-52 and F-111 bombing in advance of convoy passage, combined with TACAIR support over the convoys, permitted the successful passage of the convoys. The USDAO reported that the enemy had failed to prevent passage of any of the Mekong convoys during April.¹⁰²

(C) At the end of May, the Khmer Air Force began providing some convoy coverage near Phnom Penh. The KAF support consisted of helicopter gunship escorts backed up by T-28s on alert at Pochentong Airfield. The KAF escorts accompanied southbound convoys from Phnom Penh down the river for 15 to 20 miles, where USAF aircraft relieved them.¹⁰³

(S) The need for the SMAS ceased at the end of April with development of the expanded ABCCC target validation operations.* While Mekong convoy protection remained a continuing requirement, the FANK was able to keep

*See p. 27 ff.

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the Mekong supply corridor open as a result of the responsive air support
104
available through the new procedures.

(C) Truck convoys on Routes 4 and 5 also required air support occasionally. This support was not as heavy as that which the Mekong convoys received. The Route 4 convoys carried the full spectrum of supplies, except POL, from the Khmer Republic's only deepwater port at Kompong Som to Phnom Penh. Convoys at Kompong Som and Phnom Penh, sometimes numbering over 200 trucks (many with trailers), began the 145-mile journey between the cities simultaneously. Usually they began the trip shortly after dawn and by late afternoon trucks would be arriving in both cities while the convoys still overlapped between. The primary cargo of Route 5 convoys from Battambang to Phnom Penh* was rice; they returned empty or with military supplies to Battambang. FACs accompanied the road convoys, but 7AF did not schedule strike aircraft specifically as road convoy escorts. During the day FACs requested any needed support through ABCCC as they did for any other immediate target outside FREEDOM DEAL. In addition, the two AC-130s which patrolled the Phnom Penh area nightly also provided protection for road convoys. One FAC noted that although the insurgents frequently interdicted land LOCs, they seldom bothered the convoys after
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the FANK reopened the roads.

(S) The USDAO believed the enemy offensive against the Government LOCs had subsided by the end of May 1973. With high levels of U.S. air

*A distance of 310 miles.

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support, the FANK had kept Phnom Penh's key supply routes open through the height of the offensive. However, the effort had sometimes been frustrating for the USDAO. It was in mid-April, just after reporting the severe political and economic dependence of the Khmer Government on the arrival of a Mekong convoy, that the USDAO made the following comment regarding a listing of critical supplies in Phnom Penh: "Above figures incomplete due to Khmer New Year celebrations now in progress and resultant extreme difficulty in locating responsible Khmer officials."¹⁰⁶

CHAPTER IV

THE APPLICATION OF U.S. AIRPOWER, 1973

(S) General Vogt described the 1973 U.S. air effort in the Khmer Republic as "the most difficult campaign I've had to fight since I've been Commander of 7AF. . . ." His frame of reference included "the sustained enemy offensive in South Vietnam, the war in the North over Hanoi and, of course, the campaign in Laos." He explained that American airmen had been operating in a highly populated area within about 50 miles of Phnom Penh. The area was dense with air traffic: numerous civilian airliners of several nations flew over the battle area each day along with approximately 200 TACAIR sorties, 40 B-52 sorties, and many supporting aircraft--a total of some 300 to 350 aircraft flying in a confined airspace every 24 hours. The lack of U.S. advisers on the ground, the poor quality of some of the FANK leadership, and the fragility of the FANK forces further complicated the situation.

(U) The operational concepts which General Vogt and his USSAG/7AF staff applied in the Khmer Republic were not unfamiliar; however, their use there identified new strengths and weaknesses of individual techniques and systems.

AC-130 Beacon Strikes

(S) The immense value of the ground beacon was that it provided an easily identifiable offset aim point for all-weather ordnance delivery.

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(S) AC-130 gunships had previously used both radar (Models SST-201, 119, 125, or 181) and Tactical Electro-Magnetic Ignition Generator (TEMIG) beacons in South Vietnam and Laos as early as 1969-1970.¹⁰⁹ The X-band beacon is strictly a locator beacon, while the TEMIG can also transmit coded target information which is displayed on a panel in the aircraft.¹¹⁰

(S) For several interrelated reasons, the use of beacons with the AC-130 SPECTRES was not as successful in the Khmer Republic as it had been in South Vietnam and Laos. First, the small number of English-speaking Khmer FAGs limited the effectiveness of the gunship/beacon combination for immediate air support. Ground commanders who were not FAGs did not have the authority to validate targets for gunship strikes. In such cases, the ground commander or ABCCC lost valuable time obtaining validation from Bakheng Control. A more serious problem was the lack of Khmers who were trained to use the beacons.¹¹¹ Since all beacons were used to identify the friendly position, instructions from the ground FAG were required in order to determine bearing and distance to the target, as well as the type of target. The Khmer Republic FAGs' limited English capability greatly restricted the effectiveness of gunship close air support. Furthermore, these FAGs were normally located at major unit headquarters, which were as a rule too far removed from troops actually in contact to permit effective beacon utilization. Most TIC situations occurred 3 to 5 NM from FAG/Beacon locations; therefore, gunships could not employ their close air support tactics as designed. The original concept called for the beacon to be positioned along with the troops in contact, which enabled the gunship

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to fire at offset distances of from 100 to 1,500 meters from friendly positions, depending on the type ordnance used and the proximity of friendly troops to the impact area. The 1,500 meter distance limitation is primarily due to mechanical limits of the fire control system and the gunship antenna's capability to receive a continuous beacon signal from the friendly FAG position. As distances increased in excess of 1,500 meters from the FAG beacon location, signal reception became intermittent and finally unusable for the gunships fire control system to compute offset distance. Gunships did improvise, however, when encountering a remote beacon location: by using the signal to locate the friendly position, then using multiple offset computations involving the fire control computer and inertial navigation system, the gunship was able to arrive at the FAG-directed ordnance impact point. Aircraft sensors were then locked on to prominent ground features and a firing orbit was established around the target. Registry rounds were fired so the FAG could check the impacts vis-a-vis the desired target. After making adjustments, the gunship fired for effect. This was time-consuming and required a reasonably fluent English-speaking FAG, but was very effective in utilizing the gunships' fire power. In any case, the Khmer Republic needed more English-speaking FAGs trained to work with AC-130 gunships and associated close air support beacon equipment.

(S) Here, again, the lack of U.S. advisers was detrimental and the problem was compounded by the Khmer Government's unwillingness to send FAGs out of the country for training. Not only were the FAGs needed in-country,

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but also the FANK high command apparently was not familiar with gunship/ beacon tactics and their potential in TIC situations. On the positive side, a slowly increasing number of firings off the TEMIGs in the summer of 1973 indicated that the FANK were becoming aware of the AC-130/TEMIG potential. 113

(C) The SPECTREs, which provided most of the close air support for the FANK during the hours of darkness, used the TEMIGs during night-time Mekong convoy protection. The TEMIGs were given to the convoy commanders, who were briefly shown how to use them. However, three problems made the tactic generally unsuccessful. First, because a convoy commander's ship was a moving platform, the targeting information for any target relative to it continually changed and prevented the determination of a fixed offset aim point. Second, many of the vessels in the convoy were beyond the range of the TEMIG signal because the convoy was stretched out for several miles along the river. Third, when the enemy fired on the convoy, the convoy commander naturally went below deck for protection. The metal hull of the boat attenuated the TEMIG's signal so that the gunship had difficulty detecting the transmission. One story illustrative of problems the gunships had with the TEMIGs concerned a convoy commander who had been told not to leave the TEMIG turned on for long periods of time because of the drain on batteries. When a SPECTRE attempted to acquire the TEMIG signal one night, the most the crew could detect was a faint, intermittent signal much like static. The crew reported the TEMIG as malfunctioning but later information disclosed that the convoy commander had been below deck rapidly clicking the TEMIG on and off to conserve the batteries. 114

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(S) Regardless of their problems with beacons, the AC-130s maintained their well-established reputation as an effective weapon for close air support. Because the anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) and surface-to-air missile threat was relatively small in the Khmer Republic, the gunships were able to stay above ground fire and still be low enough to provide effective fire support for the FANK. There were some reports of SA-7 firings and small caliber AAA, but generally the AAA and missile threats were countered. ¹¹⁵

Adding to the effectiveness of the SPECTREs in the Khmer Republic was the installation of trainable 40mm and 105mm guns. The 16th Special Operations Squadron at Ubon RTAFB received new gun mounts in May 1973 and within 40 days outfitted all of the H model AC-130s with the trainable 40mm guns in addition to movable 105mm weapons. Reports indicated that the new capability significantly improved the AC-130s' performance in the close air support role by allowing the sensor operators to rapidly acquire and fire ordnance at fixed or fleeting targets. A major advantage was being able to move the ordnance impacts along a tree line or revetment by simply moving the guns and not having to change the aircraft firing orbit. ¹¹⁶

F-111 Beacon Bombing

(S) As in Laos, the use in the Khmer Republic of F-111s with beacons was a very successful operation. The F-111/beacon combination was a product of the last months of U.S. air operations in Laos when 7AF needed an all-weather, day and night bombing capability responsive to immediate air strike requests from ground commanders. Before its utilization with the

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AN/PPN-18 transponder beacon, the F-111 bombed only preplanned targets using a concept of operations similar to B-52 ARC LIGHT missions. Because its medium altitude radar bombing mission required the advanced preparation of radar maps followed by crew briefings, a process which consumed several hours, the F-111 could not be diverted while airborne to support rapidly changing ground situations. Upon its introduction into F-111 operations, however, the beacon provided an easily identifiable and accurate offset aim point for the F-111. The only data the F-111 needed to divert to an immediate target were the bearing to the target from the beacon, the distance from the beacon to the target, and the target elevation. With this information set into its on-board computer, the F-111 was prepared to strike the new target. According to a 7/13AF report on the F-111/beacon combination used in Laos, it "proved to be an effective, reliable and accurate method for flexible employment of the unique all-weather attack capabilities of the F-111 aircraft in support of ground forces." ¹¹⁷ Thus, 7AF quickly applied the technique in the Khmer Republic when U.S. air operations escalated there.

(S) The USDAO began to implant F-111 beacons in the Khmer Republic in March 1973. By mid-June 1973 there were 10 beacons in operation at population centers and critical points on LOCs. (See Figure 4.) The F-111/beacon combination successfully provided direct air support because each beacon was located near a FAG, and the F-111's effective range from the beacon was 16 miles. Using their radar, the F-111s flew through the Southwest Monsoon thunderstorms and, with the beacon targeting information

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THAILAND

LAOS

SOUTH
VIETNAM

Mekong River

Kompong Thom

Kompong Cham

Phnom Penh

Rt 1

Neak
Luong

Rt 2

Takeo

Rt 3

Kampot

Rt 4

Kompong Speu

Phsar Oudong

Kompong
Chhnang

Pursat

Rt 5


Rt 6

Rt 7

Figure 4

F-111 Beacon Locations
as of 11 June 1973

SOURCE: Special Instruction Report (S), USSAG/D000, 11 Jun 73.



provided by the FAG through ABCCC, delivered their ordnance accurately. At Takeo, for example, the F-111s beacon-bombed from 15,000 feet through rainstorms and overcast, on occasion dropping the bombs as close as 200 meters from friendly troops.¹¹⁸ They struck in this same manner at Neak Luong when the KI attempted to interdict the Mekong there. The KI massed forces around the city, waited for inclement weather, and attacked when the weather moved in. Severe thunderstorms in the afternoon forced the FACs out of the area. Even the gunships were ineffective in the bad weather; but the F-111s pounded the enemy positions all that afternoon, evening, and the next day, bombing as close as 400 meters to friendly troops. Under the persistent bombing the KI quit the attack, leaving¹¹⁹ Neak Luong in Government hands.

F-111 Pathfinders

(S) The F-111/beacon combination with the F-111 in the pathfinder role added still another dimension of flexibility to U.S. TACAIR support. Although General Vogt described the A-7s and F-4s as "the real workhorses" in the Khmer Republic, those aircraft by themselves were severely hampered by inclement weather. As pathfinders, the F-111s led the A-7s and F-4s through bad weather to the targets and used the beacons to fix precise ordnance release points.¹²⁰

F-4 Pathfinders for B-52s

(S) Lack of a ground radar site to direct bombing strikes against enemy onslaughts in the southern half of the Khmer Republic was the basis

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for developing the innovative tactic of F-4 PAVE PHANTOMS acting as pathfinders* for B-52s. (The B-52's radar bombing system required precise aiming points which were a rarity in the flat, water-laden terrain of the southern Khmer Republic.) After the Vietnamese cease-fire and deactivation of the COMBAT SKYSPOT radar at Bien Hoa Air Base, South Vietnam, the remaining SKYSPOT coverage from sites in Thailand extended only to targets north of Phnom Penh and then only on certain axes of attack. Since political reasons precluded the relocation of a COMBAT SKYSPOT site to the Khmer Republic, other tactics had to be developed. One solution to the problem was found in late March 1973 when PAVE PHANTOMS, fitted with three external tanks to optimize their refueling cycle, were used to lead B-52s¹²¹ over the targets.

(S) Although simple in concept, the new tactic presented some problems.** First, the F-4 pathfinders could not approach the Khmer Republic from the southwest over water because crossing the coastline disrupted their "fix" on the LORAN coordinates. Second, after the cell of three B-52s joined with the F-4 at an IP*** about 60 miles from the target, all aircraft had to maintain the formation on a fairly straight course to the target. If thunderstorms were over the target or located so as to

*In the pathfinder role, these LORAN-equipped F-4s also led A-7s and other F-4s to the targets.

**Normal LORAN charts used for navigation were not sufficiently accurate for bombing and had to be corrected through a laborious process known as SENTINEL LOCK. The corrections, requiring extensive photography to compare actual terrain features with LORAN plottings, were already in progress but 7AF had to accelerate the effort.

***IP = Initial Point.



require a deviation from course, the B-52s had to abort their primary target run and proceed to an alternate target. Finally, the electrical effects of thunderstorms on the LORAN systems also caused the loss of some missions against primary targets. General Vogt said that B-52 sorties were lost against primary targets almost every day because of weather but, still, over 50 percent of the B-52 strikes in the Khmer Republic between March and late July had been led by F-4s. He added that when the strikes were carried through, the accuracy was about as good as with COMBAT SKYSPOT.¹²²

B-52 Pathfinder

(S) In addition to the PAVE PHANTOMS, there was a LORAN-equipped B-52, called PAVE BUFF, that was used as a Pathfinder in Southeast Asia for ARC LIGHT strikes. The PAVE BUFF operated* in essentially the same manner as the PAVE PHANTOMS and had the same problems.¹²³

B-52 Beacon Bombing

(C) The employment of ground radar beacons (Wet Snow) for B-52s also helped compensate for the loss of the COMBAT SKYSPOT capability in Vietnam. The first B-52 beacons were collocated with F-111 beacons at the end of March 1973, and the bombers began testing the new system shortly thereafter. The first actual B-52/beacon bombing missions occurred in mid-June. By the end of July there were eight active B-52 beacons collocated with F-111

*(S) PAVE BUFF was launched from U-Tapao with a cell of three B-52s, and after effecting a release for this cell, it would depart for an orbit area. Here it would rendezvous with another cell from either U-Tapao or Andersen AFB, Guam, and lead them to their target. Normally, two or three cells were led in this manner each day.

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beacons. There was no B-52 beacon at either Kampot or Phnom Penh. One had been collocated with an F-111 beacon on the roof of the American Embassy in Phnom Penh, but they were both removed earlier for fear that the Embassy could be bombed accidentally. Although the precautions taken by the aircrews made such an occurrence unlikely, a B-52 or an F-111 offset bombing system could be set to bomb in the direct mode, i.e., to bomb the beacon rather than the offset aim point. The repercussions which would surely have followed such a mistake made the risk unacceptable.*¹²⁴

(C) Although the concept and the effective range (17 miles) of the B-52/beacon system were nearly the same as the F-111/beacon system, the B-52 still could not divert to immediate targets because Embassy approval was required for each ARC LIGHT strike. Thus, the B-52s generally bombed enemy staging areas and insurgent forces removed from TIC situations, although they were used close to friendly positions on some occasions toward the end of the bombing campaign when the enemy applied severe pressure on Phnom Penh.¹²⁵

Support

(S) Support requirements for B-52 and TACAIR strike aircraft generated over one half as many support sorties as attack sorties¹²⁶ --RF-4Cs for photographic reconnaissance, KC-135s for refueling and radio relay, EB-66s for electronic reconnaissance of possible enemy missile threats, FAC OV-10s, and ABCCC. Seventh Air Force scheduled EB-66 electronic reconnaissance of

*It was apparently just such a mistake that caused the incident discussed in the footnote on page 63.



CHAPTER V

SITUATIONS AND RESPONSES, 1973

(S) As discussed above,* the U.S. Defense Attache in Phnom Penh reported that the general military situation in the Khmer Republic had approached the critical state in March 1973. While the U.S. had withheld air support during February and the first part of March in deference to the Khmer Government's unilateral cessation of hostilities, the Khmer Insurgents, aided by the VC/NVA, had begun a campaign apparently designed to isolate Phnom Penh by closing all main arteries logistically important to that city.¹³⁰ The enemy forces placed themselves along the Mekong River just north of Neak Luong where the river narrows. There they attacked the river convoys bringing in supplies to Phnom Penh. They did the same thing along Route 5--the "Rice Route" from Battambang. At various times they interdicted Route 4, which connects Phnom Penh to its seaport, Kompong Som. Phnom Penh was being cut off from its sources of food, fuel, and military equipment. Since the KI had not made any strong advance on the city by early April, they apparently hoped to see the capital fall as a result of their interdiction efforts.¹³¹

(S) The sustained enemy interdiction effort, coupled with terrorist attacks against sensitive installations and important government personnel, had overtaxed the FANK's capabilities and driven the Army's morale dangerously low. The USDAO descriptions of the ground situations contained reports

*See pp. 27 and 34-39.

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of FANK's "lack of aggressiveness" and "reluctance to initiate offensive actions."¹³² Part of the problem was in the distribution of pay to FANK soldiers, a problem which led to several demonstrations in Phnom Penh by troops demanding their pay.¹³³ Even after the pay problem was alleviated in March, FANK commanders continued to report problems with morale and discipline. In one case reported by the USDAO, a paratroop brigade refused to cross the Mekong to engage the enemy south of Neak Luong, because they believed the enemy was far superior. They remained in defensive positions on the west bank "despite repeated orders and entreaties by the General Staff and a personal visit by [Major General] Sosthene Fernandez."¹³⁴

(S) Even when successfully encouraged to advance on enemy positions, FANK units seemed to fall into a pattern of advancing to contact and immediately falling back to defensive positions.¹³⁵ Many times they lost their weapons to the enemy. One FAC told of a FANK unit's experience with a 105mm howitzer: the enemy would capture the cannon, use it against the FANK commander's unit until the ammunition was exhausted, and then let the FANK recapture it. When the FANK received more ammunition for the gun, the enemy would capture it again and repeat the cycle. When the FANK lost weapons and supplies to the enemy, the FACs tried to bring in air strikes to destroy the booty; however, even if the strikes were successful, the government forces lost valuable assets.¹³⁶

(U) An incident on 17 March added political turmoil to an already grave military situation. A disgruntled KAF pilot commandeered a T-28 and bombed the presidential palace.¹³⁷ Lon Nol declared a state of siege the next day.

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(S) In April the KI efforts to isolate Phnom Penh and the FANK's poor performances heightened the crisis atmosphere in Phnom Penh. The USDAO reported that the KI made the greatest efforts in many months to control the Mekong and to seize Takeo, about 40 miles south of Phnom Penh. ¹³⁸

In early April, the uncertain status of the Mekong as the primary LOC to Phnom Penh prompted Brigadier General Cleland to request USAF airlift of JP-4 jet engine fuel from U-Tapao, Thailand, to Pochentong Airfield.

General Cleland intended to build and maintain a five-day supply of fuel as the KI and FANK contested control of the Mekong. ¹³⁹ The airlift was part of a plan known as SCOOT (Supply of Cambodia Out of Thailand), which the JCS had initiated in November 1972 to facilitate continuation of Military Assistance Program aid to the Khmer Republic when the U.S. staging bases in South Vietnam became unavailable. (The plan called for the development of surface LOCs between Thailand and the Khmer Republic, in particular a rail line to Battambang, but it also provided for airlift of supplies in case the enemy interdicted the Government LOCs.) ¹⁴⁰ While General Cleland had employed only a small part of the airlift option, the implementation of that part was evidence of the enemy's pressure on the Khmer Government's LOCs.

(S) During the last week in April the enemy's advance to within artillery and mortar range of Phnom Penh nearly precipitated the evacuation of American Embassy personnel. Although Takeo on Route 2 was still in Government hands, a village only 10 miles south of the capital on Route 2 had recently fallen to the KI. The FANK had been unwilling to fight for

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the village or for other areas over the previous two months. Because of the FANK's poor performance and the increasing enemy pressure on Phnom Penh, the Ambassador had prepared to evacuate dependents and less-essential personnel, at least temporarily, in case an emergency ensued. ¹⁴¹ On 25 April, insurgents in considerable strength appeared on the east bank of the Mekong just across from Phnom Penh with weapons capable of firing into the city. Seventh Air Force targeted F-111s against the enemy positions that evening and scheduled TACAIR strikes for the next morning. During the evening of the 25th, Pochentong Airfield began receiving 122mm rocket rounds. The insurgents seemed to be making a determined attempt to cut off the city and to make escape impossible. Although F-111s were bombing across the river at the time and the enemy artillery had not fired, the 122mm rocket rounds were still impacting and Ambassador Swank expected an artillery barrage at any time. He believed the Embassy and its residents would be choice targets for the artillery. ¹⁴² At about midnight General Vogt received a call from the Embassy, and, at the Embassy's request, he prepared to execute the USSAG/7AF Noncombatant Emergency Evacuation Plan, nicknamed EAGLE PULL, which provided for the emergency evacuation of U.S. citizens, key indigenous personnel, and certain third-country nationals from Phnom Penh. ¹⁴³ Since C-130s could not fly into Pochentong with the airport being rocketed, General Vogt scrambled CH-53 heavy lift helicopters from Nakhon Phanom RTAFB to Ubon RTAFB on alert for immediate dispatch to planned landing sites in Phnom Penh. Under the constant F-111 bombardment during the night, however, the enemy was unable or unwilling to position their


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artillery, and the threat subsided. Apparently, heavy TACAIR strikes
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the next morning completely broke the attack.

(S) The enemy was more determined at Takeo. The insurgents had begun a campaign in late March to take that provincial capital, and their attacks, aided by captured 105mm howitzers, increased in frequency and intensity during the first part of April. During the month the FANK forces withdrew behind an ever-shrinking defense perimeter around Takeo until the enemy was able to use 120mm mortars against the city. So sure was the NVA of the KI's success that Radio Hanoi prematurely reported the city's fall,¹⁴⁵ but the FANK, supported by intense USAF strikes, managed to hold. B-52s bombarded enemy positions well outside the defense perimeter while F-111s attacked the enemy's close-in positions, striking accurately to within 200 meters of friendly troops, day and night, during all kinds of weather. With the intense air support the FANK gained confidence and slowly took the offensive at Takeo. In May the FANK ground commander¹⁴⁶ was able to expand his perimeter against the insurgent force.

(S) The experience at Takeo falsely signaled the beginning of the end of the enemy offensive as American air strikes inflicted heavy enemy casualties.¹⁴⁷ The USDAO reported that during May,

With high levels of U.S. air support, FANK held its ground, holding open the Mekong and RT 4. It absorbed the enemy's best effort in the Mekong corridor, cleared RT 5 of [enemy] units, but made essentially no progress in other key areas. U.S. air power again provided the critical difference, blunting the enemy's thrusts when FANK faltered and offering a protective screen behind which FANK could regroup.



Although the USDAO noted that the enemy had lacked the combat power to defeat the FANK, FANK troops were tired and discouraged by months of combat with only dim hopes of a cease-fire. Inflation, inefficiency, and corruption were depressing morale. Most important, the FANK strength was diminishing with each person lost, because new recruits were not entering the ranks. While the KI continued to impress recruits into service, the Khmer Government relied on volunteers until the summer of 1973, when it initiated conscription.

(S) The KI had suffered heavily, too. According to 7AF calculations, the enemy by mid-July had lost over 11,000 killed by U.S. TACAIR alone. This was approximately one-third their number when the insurgents started the offensive. There was no way to know the enemy losses in rearward areas where the B-52s normally bombed. Thus, having been punished severely by U.S. air strikes and unable to isolate Phnom Penh by interdicting the LOCs, the enemy apparently changed its strategy. Apparently in quest of an early victory, insurgent forces began direct assaults on Phnom Penh rather than quitting the offensive.

(S) The KI moved on Phnom Penh from the south and southwest, although they had to breach the natural defense line formed by the Prek Thnot River. By the end of July 1973, the insurgents had established some salients across the river. One salient along Route 3 threatened Pochentong Airfield. Pouring in air strikes near the capital, General Vogt hoped the FANK could establish a stable defense line along the Prek Thnot River before the 15 August bombing deadline. Although the KI knew that U.S. air support was

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to stop on 15 August, they were not content to stay low and wait out the bombing. ¹⁵⁰ At the end of July, the Khmer Government estimated that 30,000 ¹⁵¹ enemy troops were massed around Phnom Penh in preparation for an attack.

(S) The attack had not materialized by the 4th of August and intelligence sources suggested that it would not come for some time. An insurgent informer indicated that the offensive was not going well. According to the informer, a group of KI officials from the Phnom Penh area met in mid-July and conceded that the offensive had fallen short of the goal of causing the collapse of the Lon Nol government. They intended to continue the attack but apparently agreed that the offensive had floundered because of heavy air strikes which had inflicted many casualties and significantly hindered tactical movements and resupply. ¹⁵² General Vogt had expressed ¹⁵³ confidence in such an outcome on 20 July:

I am certainly convinced in my own mind that if air stayed in there, the enemy would ultimately be unsuccessful and think the FANK would survive indefinitely. I can't predict the future, but I would say the outlook is pretty grim . . . after the bombing stops.

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EPILOGUE

(S) On 12 August 1973, a USSAG/7AF message directed the termination of "all acts of force initiated by U.S. forces" in the Khmer Republic effective at 1100 hours local time on 15 August.¹⁵⁴ On the 15th the general military situation in the Khmer Republic remained a stand-off at Phnom Penh, with enemy troops still located around the capital's perimeter. However, the Khmer Government's prospects appeared better than at the beginning of the month. While American airpower had severely punished the insurgent forces during the last weeks of the bombing, General Vogt had been helping the Khmer Government high command formulate and execute a plan of defense that would partially fill the firepower void that would be left when the U.S. air support ended.¹⁵⁵ In an interview on 20 August 1973, General Vogt explained that plan within the context of the events of the past two months and assessed the Khmer Government's position after the bombing halt.¹⁵⁶ The transcript of that interview follows:

(S) General Vogt: When it became apparent to us that Congress was going to stop the bombing, we knew that certain actions had to be taken for the defense of Phnom Penh. We began a series of actions in this headquarters which were designed to come up with a suggested defense plan for Phnom Penh, and also actions to insure that Phnom Penh would not be deprived of its river convoys after USAF bombing support came to a halt. It became obvious to us that the convoys could not survive sustained attacks from both banks of the Mekong following the termination of bombing. Something had to be done to alter the situation on the ground. We were using as many as 160

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TACAIR sorties to support a single convoy, primarily to protect the convoys as they passed the narrows in the river.

(S) On the 4th of July we had Major General Hou Hang Sin, the J-3 [Director of Operations] of the FANK forces here [Nakhon Phanom RTAFB] at headquarters [USSAG/7AF] with selected elements of his staff to discuss plans for new activities after the bombing halt. We presented at that time a detailed plan for the defense of Phnom Penh. The plan called for setting up a defensive line around the perimeter of Phnom Penh, generally beyond the range of active 105mm howitzers, which have a range of approximately 12 miles. We indicated the points that had to be seized, held, and fortified. The plan also called for compelling the enemy to withdraw from their salients north of the Prek Thnot River on the southern front. In July, the enemy had succeeded in pushing well north of the Prek Thnot River in a salient along Highway 3, which brought them to within seven clicks [kilometers] of Pochentong Airfield. It also pushed the friendlies back in the remaining sectors, enabling the enemy to supply their 105mm field guns in the area southwest of Phnom Penh. From that vantage point the enemy was able to openly shell the city of Phnom Penh. The enemy salient southwest of the city caused the defensive lines to bow, and that put the city within field gun range.

(S) A critical element of the defensive plan was to seize the territory north of the Prek Thnot River so that major elements (specifically the 1st Division) deployed in defense of that line could be released for another major operation. That other operation was to clear the west bank

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of the Mekong River from Phnom Penh to Neak Luong along Highway 1. The strategy was to secure the west bank so that the narrows of the river, which were controlled on both banks by the enemy, would be cleared out on one bank, thereby denying the fire from that bank to the enemy and also putting defenders in a position to bring down supporting fire from the west bank against the east bank positions as convoys passed. This would offset the loss of air and would provide firepower in support of the convoy. This was considered to be a critical part of the plan because, if it didn't work out, Phnom Penh would eventually be strangled--the convoys would cease their passage because the boat captains would refuse to go down the river, and Phnom Penh would fall in time. The defensive move had to be accomplished prior to the cessation of U.S. bombing because we believed that nothing could be accomplished after the bombing halt.

(S) The plan was taken back to Phnom Penh by General Hou Hang Sin, reworked with more detail added, and presented to the high command. On the 23d of July, General Fernandez, Commander-in-Chief of the Khmer armed forces, came here for detailed discussions on the plan. Upon his return he discussed it with President Lon Nol. On 4 August, General Hou Hang Sin came back with a large element of FANK staff including J-2 [Director of Intelligence] and his planners. We then put the final touches on the defense plan for Phnom Penh. On 6 August, I traveled to Phnom Penh and met with President Lon Nol and the political high council. The plan was presented to the political high council at that time by the FANK General Staff. We had complete agreement with everybody at that meeting to proceed with the implementation of the plan.

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(S) The military situation in the middle of July was pretty grim. In a 19 July report to Admiral Gayler and Admiral Moorer, General Cleland gave an outline of the military situation and the prospects. He thought the situation looked grim. He wound up the report by stating, "I believe that as the situation now stands, neither the FANK nor the government will last long after the 15 August bombing halt if the enemy offensive continues." We had cause to be pessimistic about the situation because, as I mentioned earlier, the enemy forces had penetrated on the southern front to within seven clicks of the airfield. They had penetrated on the northwest front of the 7th Division lines and were approaching Pochentong Airfield with small groups of troops. They had begun operations up the Bassac River getting closer to Takhmau, a city southeast of Phnom Penh, and were preparing to bring fire to bear there. They had interdicted Route 1 very close to Phnom Penh along the banks of the Mekong. They had seized control of a stretch of highway at one point within three clicks of the city itself. At that point in time I brought our U.S. airpower to bear on the immediate situation.


(S) The key, of course, to clearing up the situation in other areas, particularly the Mekong and Bassac areas, was to stabilize conditions on the main front. The enemy had planned all along to make his main assault up Highway 3 across the Prek Thnot River, then drive directly into Pochentong, and on into the city limits. I mentioned the salient where he had succeeded in driving into the friendly defenses. So, I concentrated, for a period of some three weeks, the main weight of U.S. air efforts on those enemy positions.



This meant targeting B-52s and F-111s as close as we possibly could to the forward FANK troops to inflict enemy casualties. We used 20 to 30 sorties of F-111s and as many as 30 sorties of B-52s across that front line every day. It meant that we had to take risks. With all that firepower there was always the possibility of a short round which could cause catastrophic casualties in friendly positions.* We had no alternative but to put that firepower in there; otherwise, that front would have collapsed, and the enemy's concentrated drive on three fronts--southeast up the Bassac/Route 1 area, south up the Route 3 salient, and from the northwest down Highway 5--would succeed. There was no other alternative but to break the back of the main enemy forces on the south by using Air Force firepower. I accepted those risks and brought the airplanes in close proximity to friendly forces.

(S) The enemy forces now announced that they were undertaking the final assault against Phnom Penh. They stated that they would be in Phnom Penh in a short period of time. They stockpiled ammo, weapons, and equipment in areas of the city of Phnom Penh and infiltrated troops with the idea of causing a major uprising in the city when the front began to collapse, so that the city would fall--a two-pronged effort, one from within the city, and the other, of course, from the various thrusts toward the city. This was an all-out drive to seize the city of Phnom Penh. The

*Two short round incidents did occur during the closing weeks of the campaign. One was a B-52 strike which press reports said killed over 100 civilians and friendly soldiers in Neak Luong. Another was an F-111 which hit friendly positions on an island in the Mekong River near Neak Luong.¹⁵⁷



The enemy stated publicly and in the official documents that we later captured that they were determined to take the city of Phnom Penh while the U.S. Air Force was still bombing to "inflict a major political defeat on President Nixon." That was the propaganda and morale factor they were hoping to take advantage of. If we could not save Phnom Penh despite all this U.S. air, then how could we help to save any other major area of SEA in the future? What good would the U.S. air guarantee be in a future involvement if we couldn't turn off this enemy offensive in Phnom Penh? I think they felt that this would have a tremendous morale effect throughout SEA, and perhaps change the whole course of the war. Thus, it became doubly important to us that this attack be turned off, that the enemy offensive be destroyed.

(S) The targeting that was done at this time was extremely difficult. The enemy understood that the closer they got to friendly forces, the less vulnerable they would be to U.S. air because of the difficulty of putting in heavy firepower close to friendly forces. They issued orders to their troops to move in close to friendly defenses and press hard all the time. It was this problem we confronted. In addition, the area we were now working in was heavily populated with very many villages, some still occupied, which we had to carefully avoid in our bombing. It was a cardinal rule, of course, in our Rules of Engagement that we could not attack villages even though the enemy was known to be in there, because of the friendly casualties that would be inflicted--civilian casualties. We had to work around many, many villages and populated areas. This was a problem

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we'd never had before in my experience over here. Previously, we'd been bombing in relatively unoccupied areas in defense of specific objectives. Our defense of cities in South Vietnam, like An Loc, was done in the relatively sparse areas surrounding the cities. There were no built-up areas, no large villages, especially outside the population centers. This was different; here we had to work around them. This meant that we had to know the status of each of the villages, whether or not they were still occupied. So, we adopted a technique using some new IR [infrared] equipment that had just been delivered here on RF-4 airplanes. It permitted us to tell whether or not a city was dead by the heat emissions from the city. We began extensive mapping programs of all the villages in the area to determine which were still occupied and which were no longer occupied, using all sources of information, but relying very heavily on this new, very effective IR equipment in the airplane. Each day we plotted on a large chart the status of all those villages so that we could properly plan our bombing.

(S) At the end of our bombing campaign, beginning about six days before the actual termination of the bombing, the enemy began to fall back. He had suffered such heavy casualties in all areas, particularly in the southern front area, that he could no longer sustain the offensive. It began with one unit commander on the southern front reporting that he was compelled to fall back from the line. As he began to withdraw, the elements on his flank reported that their position was now untenable in view of the one withdrawal, and they would have to fall back also. So

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about five or six days before the bombing halt, the whole enemy offensive collapsed on all fronts around the city of Phnom Penh, and they began a withdrawal. We had reports now, good, valid intelligence sources, indicating that the enemy literally lost thousands to air activity along that southern front. One commander reported, for example, the loss of over a thousand killed or wounded in his sector alone. Just the other day we received a report from another commander of a battalion-sized element which lost hundreds, and that did not include the sister battalions around him which also suffered heavy losses. So the enemy offensive to seize Phnom Penh was turned off, and it was turned off by U.S. airpower! Now, to read the U.S. newspapers, you get the impression that air was ineffective, and that the whole bombing of Cambodia had been worthless, that nothing had been achieved by it. The simple fact of the matter is that Phnom Penh was saved and the enemy was dealt a severe blow. He has not recovered from that blow yet.

(S) Many people, particularly the press, felt that the enemy would surge into Phnom Penh and seize the city once the bombing stopped. The enemy is attempting to get another offensive going, but he is hurting badly and it's going to take him some time to really get moving. In the meantime, following the collapse of the southern front, the friendlies were able to pull the 1st Division in its entirety from the Prek Thnot defense lines and move them over to the Route 1 area. After we softened that route all the way down to Neak Luong with U.S. air, they launched an assault. About a week before the end of the bombing, they seized the entire length of the highway



from Phnom Penh to Neak Luong and drove the enemy out from the west bank of the river. Now this move, which was a brilliant execution of a difficult plan by the 1st Division commander, went virtually unnoticed in the press. The press had been reporting just two days before that the enemy was within three clicks of the city of Phnom Penh along Route 1. They now had to concede that the road was open all the way to Neak Luong. But it was not billed as any great victory on the part of the Cambodians, although it represented a tremendous achievement on their part. So, we wound up four or five days before the bombing ended with the enemy offensive against Phnom Penh totally turned off, the enemy withdrawing on all fronts, and the friendlies extending their line well south of the Prek Thnot River. The enemy salient was completely eliminated; the line was now generally along the Prek Thnot but in some places well south of the river. The friendlies also control the entire west bank [of the Mekong] all the way to Neak Luong. Convoys that have gone up and down the river since that time have received virtually no fire at all.

(S) At the same time, extensive air was used to the west of Phnom Penh. The small enemy groups (battalions and smaller size elements that were once within two clicks of the airfield at Pochentong) were badly mauled by TACAIR controlled by FACs, and they finally had to withdraw. The [FANK] 7th Division, to the north, reestablished their positions along Highway 5, cleaned out the enemy behind their lines, and vastly improved the close-in situation around Phnom Penh.



(S) Now, another major element of the overall plan called for withdrawing FANK forces from areas that could not be defended after the bombing halt. These areas were Romeas, Skoun, Pa Kham, and other isolated outposts. It was envisioned that these isolated elements would all be withdrawn either into Kompong Cham or Kompong Chhnang. [See Figure 5.] Some elements in the south, such as at Takeo, would withdraw into Kompong Speu, and the forces released thereby could be used to better defend the more defensible points. This would also permit elements from the outlying provinces to be brought in to reconstitute a strategic defense of Phnom Penh. Now, that's one part of the plan that was not properly executed. The reason was politics. When General Fernandez requested authority to withdraw from Skoun, he was informed that In Tam, the Prime Minister, had a political following in Skoun; he was not going to pull out of there and lose face with his followers in that area. Even though he could not defend Skoun militarily, General Fernandez was compelled to stay in there until the city was actually overrun. At the end of July, Santuk was overrun, Pa Kham shortly thereafter, then Skoun, and all with substantial losses of equipment and guns (a total of eight 105mm howitzers), and many, many people killed and wounded. It was a debacle! It was unnecessary! It had been predicted in the plan we had drawn up; but since the Khmer Government didn't execute the plan properly because of political restrictions, a heavy price was paid.

(U) Question: Do you think the enemy forces will ever be strong enough again to mount a serious threat against Phnom Penh?

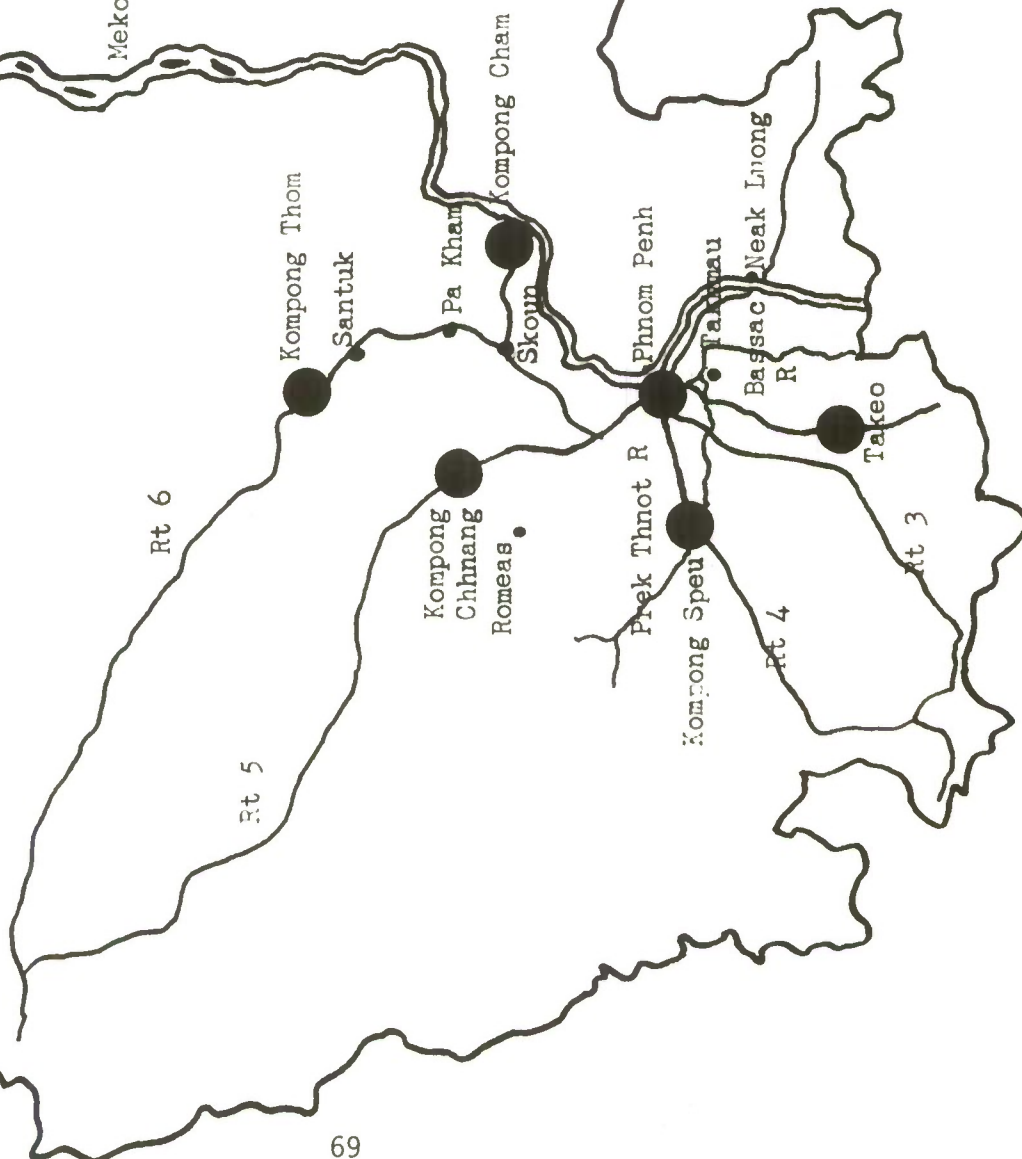
THAILAND


LAOS

Mekong R

SOUTH
VIETNAM


Locations Highlighted
by General Vogt






(S) General Vogt: Yes, I think so. We realized that some substitute had to be found for the U.S. firepower that would be withdrawn soon. The Khmer Air Force could never hope to make up this deficit. It is a small outfit with a few T-28s, about 40 of them. Ultimately, they will have about 52, with about one-half of them operational at any one time. They carry very small bomb loads. The KAF has some AU-24s which are light planes with a 20mm gun, but those aircraft are only moderately effective. It occurred to us to make more use of heavy artillery, and as part of the defense plan, we devised a central fire support system tying together the artillery of the friendlies. This fire control system would provide artillery support on any sector of the front surrounding Phnom Penh on a mass-firepower basis. I felt that if an attack were mounted by the enemy after the bombing stopped and there was no firepower support for the front line troops, they would have fled in terror and the whole thing would have collapsed. I worked very hard on getting the central fire control system set up in Phnom Penh [and] getting additional 155mm guns brought in. I brought in four additional ones. That, with the eight already there, gave them two 6-gun batteries. One was located south of Phnom Penh, the other was north. These guns, with their extensive range, would provide effective fire support for all the units deployed around the defense perimeter.

(S) I went to Phnom Penh on the 6th of August to see how the system was working, and I was pleasantly surprised to see that the fire support center had been set up in Phnom Penh as we had recommended, with land



lines and radio communications to all the batteries, and the FANK were now capable of massing fire in front of their forces around the perimeter. There were some fifty-five 105mm guns tied into this net along with the twelve 155s I mentioned previously. When I got into the field to look at the 155 battery in the south, I asked to see a demonstration of their capability to lay down fire. That day the battery was all set to fire but could not because U.S. air was operating in the target area. So, we got on the phone and withdrew our U.S. air for about 10 minutes, allowing the FANK to demonstrate their capability. I had asked them to target some bunkers in front of the 3d Division lines along the Prek Thnot. They fired five rounds from each of three guns for a total of 15 rounds in a good, professional way. I found out later from the Defense Attache in Phnom Penh that those shells had destroyed some enemy bunkers. The FANK forces had advanced to those bunkers and found the enemy had been killed inside. The FANK were now elated with this new-found capability.

(S) We had been looking for means to substitute artillery firepower for air firepower. We controlled it in a manner in which it had never been controlled before. With centralized control we could mass it and make it immediately responsive in support of the local commander on any front. Thus, the plan was implemented. We had had to get a good man to set the system up. The most competent FANK general officer down there to do this was working for President Lon Nol as an adviser. We had to go to President Lon Nol to acquire this man. The man was trained by the French in artillery and was a very good artilleryman. Lon Nol didn't



want to spare him. By pressuring Lon Nol, I acquired this man and he did a tremendous job in setting up the central fire support center. It was located next to the COC in General Staff headquarters just downstairs from the KDASC. The fire support center coordinated all the activities of the Air Force and the artillery. If a commander comes under attack, he can call into the center to get heavy artillery support in a matter of a couple of minutes. What remains to be seen, of course, is whether or not they can hold this all together during any further concentrated attacks by the enemy.

(S) As I mentioned earlier, at this point in time the enemy had been driven from the Phnom Penh area, shifted his weight to Kompong Cham, and had begun a major offensive against that provincial capital of about 75,000 people. We have worked with the FANK in coming up with a defense plan for Kompong Cham. We've had visits here for the last several days with the FANK high command. We've gone over the plan in detail and put the finishing touches on it. The plan is now being implemented by the FANK. The concepts are basically the same kinds of things we strove for in the Phnom Penh area, with centralized artillery support tying in all the defensive positions around the perimeter. Other reinforcements have already been planned. The outcome of the Kompong Cham battle may well indicate what will happen ultimately in Phnom Penh. It remains to be seen whether the defense will stand the test of time. But one thing is apparent--the friendlies have new heart now. At first they were very much discouraged at the prospects of losing U.S. air support. They now know they have a plan, a good one. If its implementation is successful, it will stabilize the defensive lines. The FANK

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will seize strategic areas along the Mekong, and generally beat the enemy back from all the forward positions so that the enemy forces no longer will threaten the security of Phnom Penh. Only time will tell, now, whether in the long term the FANK can keep it all together. They are aroused, they know what they have to do, and they are working on it. The main point I want to get across, though, is that the determined enemy push against Phnom Penh, designed to cause the fall of the city while U.S. air was still there, was utterly defeated. It may have been the biggest strategic mistake the enemy made during the war. There is no doubt in my mind that had the enemy held off on this big push until after the U.S. bombing halted, the offensive would have succeeded. There was no way those Cambodians could have prevented the fall of Phnom Penh. The enemy felt the psychological impact of taking the city despite U.S. air support was worth the gamble. He gambled and he paid a heavy price for it--very, very heavy casualties and the loss of momentum. Whether the enemy forces can put it all together again after the losses they have sustained, and successfully assault the city of Phnom Penh, is another question. I do know one thing--their prospects have gone down dramatically! I don't know whether this lesson will be lost on the American public because of the unprofessional and very biased reporting of the press recently, but those are the facts as they happened. I saw these things occurring on a daily basis and had total access to the information as the events unfolded.

(S) It is interesting to note that the enemy risked lives and jeopardized his forces for a psychological victory. The military aspects, as far as I can

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see, did not justify his attack before the bombing halt. As I mentioned earlier, he could have done it had he waited until the bombing ceased. Militarily, that was the soundest thing to do; but he sacrificed the lives of his own troops to achieve a psychological objective; a massive strategic error on the enemy's part.

(U) Question: Do you foresee the reapplication of U.S. airpower in SEA?

(S) General Vogt: Well, it's quite apparent that the Administration envisions maintaining airpower here as a deterrent, as an effective weapon for countering any possible major provocation by enemy forces. It is conceivable that if the North Vietnamese mounted a major offensive, the American Congress would authorize renewed bombing. So I don't rule it out. It would take something like a major invasion, though, before the Congress would authorize bombing again. This would have to be a major provocation, a flagrant violation of the cease-fire agreement, not merely a threat to Kompong Cham or Phnom Penh.

APPENDIX

KHMER REPUBLIC SORTIE SUMMARY

			Attack (Tactical)			Support	
	B-52		USAF*	VNAF	USMC	USAF	VNAF
1971	DEC	247	1268	1728	0	970	1382
	TOTAL	1324	16550	11824	14	18460	11631
	JAN	109	785	560	0	839	1292
	FEB	180	943	468	0	761	1511
	MAR	256	871	671	0	787	732
	APR	48	406	374	0	725	75
	MAY	27	239	131	4	563	9
	JUN	196	445	390	106	699	10
1972	JUL	148	415	353	85	385	1
	AUG	190	708	448	211	268	0
	SEP	307	327	194	166	237	0
	OCT	223	185	381	224	184	1
	NOV	167	218	20	126	233	0
	DEC	49	223	130	156	161	2
	TOTAL	1900	5765	4120	1078	5842	3633
	JAN	201	283	156	344	187	0
	FEB	65	337	0	12	93	0
	MAR	1254	3716	0	24	1475	0
	APR	1934	3425	0	334	3267	0
1973	MAY	1672 (1675)	4998 (4790)	0	425 (402)	4026 (4451)	0
	JUN	1170 (1169)	4535 (4909)	0	383 (414)	2529 (4095)	0
	JUL	(1200)	(5596)	0	(464)	(4716)	0
	1-15	(620)	(2930)	0	(277)	(2575)	0
	AUG						
	TOTAL	8115 8117	25820 25986	156	2263 2271	18868 20859	0

*Includes gunship but not B-52 sorties.

NOTE: Numbers in parentheses obtained from USSAG/DOY; others from SEAOPS.

SOURCES: SEAOPS, Dec 72; SEAOPS, Jun 73; USSAG/DOY.

UNCLASSIFIED

FOOTNOTES

1. USSAG Daily News Summary (U), Morning Report, USSAG/OI, 19 Jul 73.
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GLOSSARY

AAA	Anti-aircraft Artillery
AB	Air Base
ABCCC	Airborne Battlefield Command and Control Center
ARC LIGHT	B-52 operations in SEA
ARVN	Army of the Republic of Vietnam
BLUE CHIP	7AF command and control center
CINCPAC	Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Command
COC	Combat Operations Center
COMUSMACV	Commander, United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
COMUSSAG	Commander, United States Support Activities Group
DASC	Direct Air Support Center
FAC	Forward Air Controller
FAG	Forward Air Guide
FANK	Forces Armees National Khmer
FREEDOM DEAL	Interdiction area in the Khmer Republic
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
KAF	Khmer Air Force
KDASC	Khmer Direct Air Support Center
KI	Khmer Insurgents
LOC	Line of Communication
LORAN	Long Range Navigation
MACV	Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
MNK	Khmer Navy
NVA	North Vietnamese Army
POL	Petroleum, Oil, and Lubricants
ROE	Rules of Engagement
RTAFB	Royal Thai Air Force Base

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SA-7 Strella	Soviet-built hand-held surface-to-air missile
SCOOT	Supply Cambodia Out of Thailand
SEA	Southeast Asia
SMAS	Special Mekong Air Sector
TACAIR	Tactical air (fighter-bomber strike aircraft)
TACC	Tactical Air Control Center
TACS	Tactical Air Control System
TEMIG	Tactical Electro-magnetic Ignition Generator
TIC	Troops in Contact
USAF	United States Air Force
USDAO	United States Defense Attache Office
USSAG	United States Support Activities Group
VC	Viet Cong
VNAF	Vietnamese Air Force

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